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THE CURIOUS CASE OF
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ARE YOU HAUNTED?
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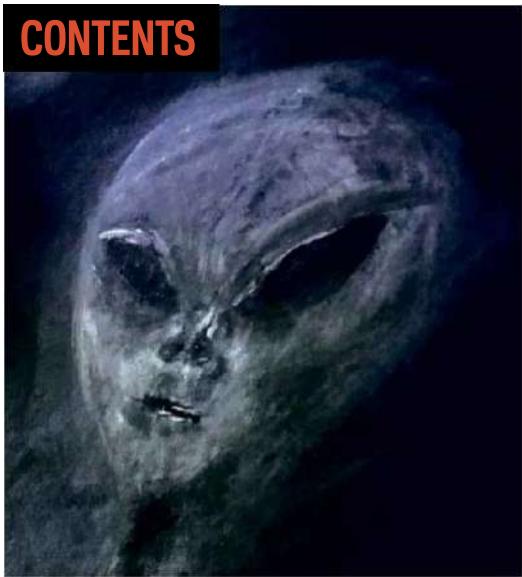
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EDITORIAL



ON THE ROAD AGAIN

While holidays to far-flung destinations may not be on the cards for most of us in 2021, this issue of FT at least offers the chance to take some imaginary journeys around the British Isles. In an extract from his long-delayed memoir, Australian cryptozoologist Tony Healy recalls his 1979 lake monster safari to Loch Morar, where a number of Loch Ness Monster hunters had decided to vary things a bit by searching for Nessie's less famous cousin, Morag (p44). Bob Fischer finds himself catching up (well, sort of) with Erwin Saunders, the elusive pixie-hunter whose latest YouTube videos see him exploring the wilds of Dartmoor in his ongoing quest to record the doings of the Little People (p40). Meanwhile, Rob Gandy returns to the haunted roads of Lincolnshire in pursuit of rare examples of two-wheeled road ghosts (p48), and Forsean Traveller Lisa Gledhill celebrates a rather subdued and Covid-compliant Beltane at Butser Ancient Farm (p74).

And in our cover feature, folklorist and museum curator Jeremy Harte focuses on a community for whom travel is a way of life – England's gypsies. June is Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month – an event established in 2008 to raise awareness of these frequently marginalised groups – and we hope that Jeremy's fascinating exploration of the supernatural stories and ghostlore of these fiercely independent communities offers some timely and unexpected insights into their way of life for all of us forseans who are part of the settled majority.

We also bring you the latest news on two ongoing mysteries – the identity of Australia's 'Somerton Man' and the fate of Flight MH370 – a report from France on a bizarre case of 'real bogus social workers', a selection of strange diets and disgusting foods, the recent story of an old-school alien abductee from Yorkshire and much more weirdness from around the world. We hope you enjoy the issue.

GETTING COPIES OF FT

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ERRATA

FT404:55: Regular FT clipper Louise Bath drew our attention to an error in Reverend Peter Law's review of *The Banishing*: Harry Price is played by Sean Harris, not Sam Harris.

FT405:40: Eric Hoffman asked us to point out that the dates of publication given for James Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover* should have been 1976–1982, not 1976–1995.

FT405:66: An error crept into David V Barrett's review of *The Witch of Kings Cross*. The text should have read "film writer Jack Sargeant", but was printed as "the film's writer Jack Sargean". The film was in fact written and directed by Sonia Bible.

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Amazon Reviews

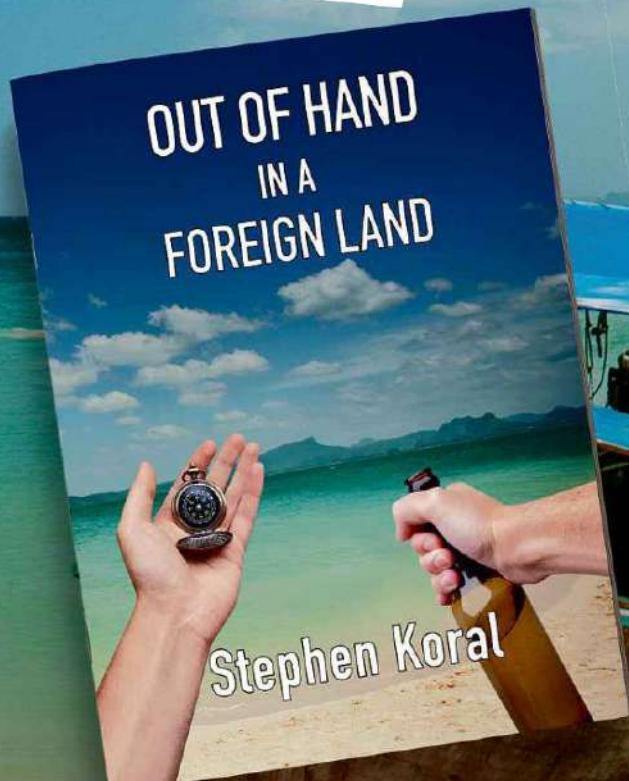
"Precisely the novel we need in this year of isolation and curbed freedoms"

"Very funny and dark"

"Not your average travel book, far more than that"

In his late twenties and appalled at the thought of doing a nine to five until he died, Stephen Koral bought a one-way ticket out of England to go and see the world. Embarking on a year long pub crawl across Asia with no fixed plans, the trip spiralled into a world of Indonesian prisons, police corruption, dodgy celebrities, and psychotic macaque monkeys. The nine to five didn't seem too bad after all.

Whether being chased by annoyed locals in India, getting completely lost in Sri Lanka, avoiding gun owners in Thailand, and possibly most dangerous of all – meeting his future wife, Koral tries to find humour in the difficult, but usually self-imposed troubles found backpacking alone on the road.



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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

REAL BOGUS SOCIAL WORKERS

France witnesses a bizarre case of conspiracy theory-fuelled kidnapping

A rare case of ostension (in which real-life events mirror an urban legend or folkloric motif) has seen the Bogus Social Worker (BSW) phenomenon being put to criminal use. Five men, described as "survivalists" by the French police, were arrested in April after two of them successfully posed as child protection officers to kidnap eight-year-old Mia Montemaggi from her grandmother in the town of Les Poulière in the Vosges region of France. The five, aged from 23 to 60, met on social media where they moved in extreme right-wing circles and it is alleged that they were recruited by Mia's mother, Lola Montemaggi, 28, to kidnap her daughter after she lost custody of her.

Mia was put in the care of her grandmother in January after Lola was reported to have made suicidal statements, expressed a desire to go "under the radar" and live on the fringes of society and refused all contact with social services. She also posted messages on Facebook indicating a belief in QAnon-related conspiracies, claiming there is a Satanic paedophile elite at the top of the French state who were guilty of the ritual sacrifice of children abducted for them by social services and child protection agencies.

The five kidnappers took Mia in what the police describe as "a military style operation", reuniting her with her mother and then taking them on foot across the nearby Swiss border. Although they did not have previous criminal records, they were already under surveillance for their extremist views and so



She claims there is a paedophile elite at the top of the French state

were swiftly picked up by the police, while Mia and her mother were found at a squat in a disused factory in St Croix. On being arrested, one of the abductors said he believed he was saving the child's life, although he admitted he might have been manipulated by the girl's mother,

while others said they were fighting against the state and "the doctors' dictatorship".

Further twists in the tale emerged when the police raided the homes of the kidnappers, finding bomb-making materials and documents suggesting they were planning to attack vaccination centres. Statements from the suspects also led the police to issue an international arrest warrant for a former French politician, Rémy Daillet-Weiderman, now living in Malaysia.

Daillet-Weiderman was originally a member of the centrist MoDem party but was

LEFT: The squat where Mia was found. BELOW LEFT: Mia Montemaggi. BELOW RIGHT: Rémy Daillet-Weiderman.

banned from it in 2010 for his extreme views. The kidnapper's statements led police to believe that he was the main figure in their so-called "movement" and had funded and masterminded the kidnapping at Mia's mother's request (possibly inciting her to make it). He has posted videos on YouTube calling for 5G networks to be destroyed and "scientifically useless" facemasks to be banned and has spoken out against chemtrails. On his website, entitled "Call for the overthrow of the government of the French Republic", he details 81 measures he wants to implement once in power, including banning vaccination, suspension of fines and taxes, the removal of speed cameras, withdrawal from European treaties and the prosecution of all ministers since 1981. However, his following in conspiracy circles remains fairly modest. He has not denied involvement in the kidnapping, but denies it was a kidnapping, saying: "This is not an abduction but a return of a child to her mother at her request. There is a concern among the population about abusive placements."

At the time of writing, Daillet-Weiderman had not been arrested, although the French police are also interested in speaking to him in relation to the defacement of a monument with Holocaust-denial graffiti and an attack on a gendarme by someone claiming to be his follower. Mia has been returned to her grandmother, Lola is awaiting extradition from Switzerland to France and the kidnappers remain in custody. *BBC News, 16+19+20 April; Guardian, 21 April; Franceinfo, 22 April 2021.*



GHOSTS ON THE STAGE

Strange tales from haunted theatres

PAGE 16



PREHISTORIC PRETENDER

Rumbling a cryptozoological fake

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NIGHT OF THE "IGUANA"

Weird creature terrorises Polish apartment block

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SOMERTON MAN EXHUMED

The Tamám Shud cold case is reopened with a search for DNA matches



ABOVE LEFT: The scrap of paper with "Tamám Shud" printed on it. ABOVE RIGHT: The man found dead on Somerton beach.

Police in Australia have exhumed the body of Somerton Man, the mysterious individual at the heart of what is sometimes known as the "Tamám Shud" case (see FT351:30-35). The man was found dead, slumped against the sea wall on the beach at Somerton, South Australia, on 1 December 1948. He was dressed in a suit and tie, but his pockets contained nothing to identify him and the labels had been cut out of his clothes. All attempts to discover who the man was, or to ascertain the cause of his death, failed; but investigators did find a tightly-rolled piece of paper in one of his pockets with the words "Tamám Shud" – meaning "It is finished" in Persian – printed on them. The paper turned out to have been torn from a copy of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* that was found on the back seat of a car parked nearby, but whose owner knew nothing of the dead man. This further complicated things, as it was an edition that wasn't supposed to exist. A so-far uncracked cipher was also found among the dead man's equally anonymous possessions, as well as a phone number that led to a nurse living in Somerton; she denied knowing the man, but appeared upset on being shown a plaster cast of his head.

There has been much speculation as to who the man was and why he died on Somerton beach, with suggestions ranging from spurned lover to Cold War spy, but no definitive answers. He was buried, still unidentified, in Adelaide's West Terrace Cemetery, and that is where he has remained until now.

On 19 May, South Australian police exhumed the corpse as part of their Operation Persevere, which investigates historic cold cases with the aim of giving names to all unidentified individuals who have died in the region. The intention is to extract DNA from the man's bones and use this to trace any living relatives he may have. In addition, forensic anthropologists will examine the bones and an odontologist will look at the man's teeth for any further clues. There was a previous attempt to use Somerton Man's DNA to identify him, using hairs found embedded in the cast of his head, but these only yielded limited amounts of DNA that proved insufficient to match him to any relatives. Professor Derek Abbott told the media

that the bones were in a good condition on exhumation and that he is hopeful of a "good result". He said this analysis would be "a different ball game" from a regular crime scene DNA analysis. In those cases, scientists use a basic matching technique involving just 23 markers on the DNA, but for the Somerton Man match they will be able to use in the region of 800,000 markers, giving far greater accuracy. Researchers will also be matching the DNA against genealogical websites, not just crime databases, allowing them to search for matches internationally against anyone who has used a commercial DNA analysis service to research their ancestry. This would enable them to potentially identify any descendants, or even cousins, who may finally be able to give Somerton Man his identity back and possibly even solve the mystery of how he wound up dead on an Australian beach. *Pedestrian.tv* 19 May; *Adelaidenow.com.au* 24 May; *9news.com.au* 22 May; *abc.net.au* 24 April 2021.



EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

GERALDINE WINNER'S LIFE SAVED BY HAIR CURLERS

Sunday Times, 29 Sept 2019.

Cornwall dog walkers take up martial arts in response to waffle theft

corwalllive.com, 3 Feb 2020.

'JESUS' HELD FOR ANNOYING MAGISTRATE

D.Mirror, 17 Sept 2020.

'Big brained' mammals may just have small bodies, study suggests

Guardian, 28 April 2021.

PRINCE CHARLES' 'SECRET SON' BELIEVES ROYAL HAD HIS 'EYES AND TEETH CHANGED' IN COVER-UP

D.Mirror, 29 April 2021.





A MUSEUM THAT'S HARD TO SWALLOW

The Disgusting Food Museum in Malmö, Sweden, introduced a drinks menu in the form of a temporary exhibition, which opened last September. Most of the drinks on display are beverages commonly consumed somewhere in the world, but which would revolt outsiders unfamiliar with the taste – including bitter herbal liquors like *Gammel Dansk*, drunk in Denmark, and *Fernet-Branca*, an Italian amaro.

The museum opened in 2018 with the intention of provoking reflection on how our notions about what is delicious or disgusting are culturally determined. Items on regular display include a bull's penis, frog smoothies from Peru, a wine made of baby mice consumed in China and Korea, a strong Scottish brew poured from the mouth of a dead squirrel, and Sweden's *surstromming*, an infamously putrid fermented herring – and, of course, durian fruit from southeast Asia, the smell of which has been likened to a blend of raw sewage and strawberry jam.

Many of the fermented beverages are equally stomach-churning, such as an ancient Korean "poo wine", concocted from fermented child's faeces and rice, once used as a medicine to heal broken bones and bruises, but not

familiar to Koreans today. Other drinks include *chicha de muko* – spit-fermented corn meal beer from Peru, Finnish whisky matured in a herring cask, a Ugandan gin made from fermented bananas, and a wine made from an overripe orange fermented in the tank of a prison lavatory. Another liquid refreshment featured is an Icelandic beer made with whale testicles smoked in sheep's dung.

One display tells what happened in the Soviet Union when the government closed alcohol stores to reduce drunkenness: people began drinking perfumes and varnish, leading to many deaths. At the entrance to the museum, marks on a blackboard indicate each time someone has vomited while visiting. At the time of the report, museum director Andreas Ahrens corrected a number to read "2 days since last vomit." [AP] 4 Sept 2020.

Clockwise from top of facing page: The "Cuy" guinea pig, a culinary speciality from Peru; A "Bull Penis" from China; Mongolian "Sheep Eyeball Juice"; "Mouse Wine" from China; *Balut*, a boiled duck embryo popular in the Philippines; Japanese "Habushu" snake wine. **PHOTOS:** JONATHAN NACKSTRAND / AFP via Getty Images.



STRANGE DAYS

SIDELINES...

SQUID STATUE

The coastal town of Noto in Japan decided to spend 25 million yen (£164,700) of the 800m yen (£5.3m) in government covid relief it received on building a 13m (43ft) long bright pink statue of a squid instead of medical staff or long-term care facilities. A spokesman for the town was unrepentant and told Fuji News Network that it was part of a strategy to celebrate flying squid, a local delicacy, to attract tourists after the epidemic was over. *BBC News, 4 May 2021.*

ASBO SWAN

An antisocial swan has been tormenting a Northampton neighbourhood for the past five years by hammering on doors and rattling letterboxes with his beak. Nobody is quite sure why 'Cedric the Asbo Swan' has been behaving in this way, sometimes for up to three hours. "It's a flipping nuisance," says local councillor Stephen Legg. *D.Mirror, 25 Mar 2021.*

WINDFALL FROM SPACE

Treasure hunters were searching for a meteorite thought to have landed somewhere on the Dorset-Hampshire border after streaking across the sky on 20 March. It could be worth thousands of pounds. *Sun, 8 April 2021.*

KITCHEN BLAST

Irritated by a fly and unaware that a gas cylinder was leaking in his kitchen, a Frenchman in his 80s grabbed an electric fly-swatting rocket, swung at the insect, and caused an explosion that brought down the ceiling and rendered his home uninhabitable in Parcoul-Chenaud, Dordogne. The fly's fate was unknown. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 8 Sept 2020.*



MARTIN ROSS

COVID CORNER | More crazy cures, further online blunders and the horror of India's 'black fungus'

MASKED ANTI-MASKERS

The ever-evolving world of anti-vaccine/anti-mask/Covid denial conspiracy theories has now come almost full circle. As more and more people are vaccinated there are now concerns among anti-vaccine groups that individuals could be at risk from 'vaccine shedding', which proposes that those who have had their shots will now be shedding Covid virus spike proteins that will cause irregular menstruation, infertility and miscarriages. These concerns are completely without scientific validity and are based on a misunderstanding both of how vaccines work and of the interaction between viral proteins and fertility, and derive from the belief that Covid-19 is an engineered pandemic intended to depopulate the world and that the vaccine is part of this process. Either that, or that the virus was a hoax designed to get us to submit to vaccination with dangerous fertility-destroying substances. Due to this fear of contamination by shed proteins, conspiracy groups who were previously defiantly opposed to social distancing are now contemplating advocating it to keep themselves 'safe'.

Likewise, some anti-mask advocates are suggesting their use to defend against the inhalation of these non-existent shed proteins – although some are pointing out that these will go through masks "just like the virus", a claim also unsupported by evidence. *Vice, 11 May 2021.*

MASKED LAMB

At the height of the latest lockdown, farmer Robert Hudson was surprised by a lamb born on his farm in Bedale, North Yorkshire, with a black mark on its face that was a perfect simulacrum of a facemask. Of the Lleyn lamb, Hudson said "They occasionally produce a random black mark, but I have never seen one like this before – the fact that it occurred during a global pandemic where everyone is wearing masks is pretty unbelievable." *D.Mirror, D.Mail, 3 April 2021.*



ROBERT HUDSON / SWNS

ABOVE: Who was that masked lamb? A sheepish simulacrum of a facemask.

INDIAN COVID "CURES"

With the focus of the pandemic now centring on India, a variety of bizarre new cures has emerged from the subcontinent. US Customs agents at Washington Dulles airport confiscated two cow dung cakes from a passenger arriving from India that were intended for use as a cure for Covid infections. Doctors in India are issuing warnings that cow dung is not an effective Covid treatment. Dr JA Jayalal, President of the Indian Medical Association, said: "There is no concrete scientific evidence that cow dung or urine works to boost immunity against COVID-19, it is entirely based on belief." Indian authorities have also reacted swiftly to the arrival of the claim that Covid is caused by 5G signals by pointing out that, as yet, India has no 5G network.

Elsewhere, an Indian advert that went viral on Twitter advocated the use of numerology to banish Covid. It said: "If you use the changed spelling of CARONAA and COVVYD-19 by affixing the same to either door or in public places or by tying the banner in all public places CARONAA will disappear from not only from Ananthapuram dist, but also the world. This is guarantee as it is divine power

as per NUMEROLOGY". The ad's originator, SV Annanadd Rao, who claimed to be a stenographer in the local judicial department, seems to have added letters to his name for numerological benefit as well. *BoingBoing.net 11 May; Indian Express, 14 May 2021.*

BLACK FUNGUS

Rather more seriously, the second wave of Covid cases in India has also led to an increase in mucormycosis, a normally rare fungal infection. The disease has surged among Indian Covid patients in recent months – there have been 7,200 cases so far this year and 219 deaths, all in Covid patients, with victims contracting the infection between 12 and 15 days after recovering from the coronavirus. Reports of a massive increase in mucormycosis have come from Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Delhi and Pune; five states, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Telangana, have declared an epidemic, and more are expected to follow. Special black fungus wards have now been set up in the large government hospitals to deal with the threat.

The infection is caused by mucor, a mould that is common in soil, plants, manure and rotting fruits and vegetables. Spores



can be found in the mucous of healthy people, but it does not normally grow in humans. When it does take hold, it is usually in diabetic or severely immunocompromised patients, such as those with HIV/AIDS or advanced cancer. It then grows aggressively, affecting the nose, eyes, and brain. Overall mortality from mucormycosis infection can be as high as 50 per cent. Many of the Indian cases have been in Covid patients who were also diabetic, and doctors suspect the infection may be triggered by the use of steroids. Steroids are frequently used with Covid patients as they reduce inflammation in the lungs and help minimise the damage caused if a patient's immune system goes into overdrive in what is known as a cytokine storm. They also reduce the strength of the immune system and increase the levels of blood sugar, which is dangerous for diabetics. Dr Akshay Nair, a Mumbai-based surgeon who has operated on several mucormycosis patients, says: "Diabetes lowers the body's immune defences, coronavirus exacerbates it, and then steroids which help fight Covid-19 add fuel to the fire," giving the fungus an opportunity to infect the body. Not all mucormycosis patients have been diabetic though.

Doctors are surprised by the severity and the frequency of infections in India's second wave compared to the first – Dr

Nair said he had come across no more than 10 cases in the last two years, but "this year is something different", while Dr Raghuraj Hegde, an eye surgeon in Mumbai, said he had seen 19 patients in two weeks, some of whom were so ill that he could not operate on them. The only way to deal with mucormycosis is to operate to remove the infected tissue, then give the patient an intensive course of antifungal drugs. Many patients have lost eyes as a result of attempts to stop the infection reaching the brain and, in some cases, the jawbone has had to be removed to halt the fungus's spread. *BBC News*, 9 May 2021.

ZOOM DISASTERS

Even after more than a year of conducting meetings via Zoom and similar apps, some people have still not quite got the hang of the technology. Canadian MP William Amos only had his modesty preserved by the phone he was holding when he took off his jogging clothes to change for a meeting, unaware that the video feed to fellow Members of Parliament was already on. He claimed his embarrassing mishap was "an honest mistake" and promised it would not happen again. Fellow MP Claude DeBellefeuille suggested: "It might be necessary to remind members, especially male ones, that a tie and jacket are obligatory."

No such excuse was possible

for Ohio senator Andrew Brenner, who took part in a Zoom call while at the wheel on the very day his state began a crackdown on 'distracted driving'. He had changed the background to a picture of the inside of a house so that it would appear he was calling from home, but he was rumbled by other participants who wondered why he might need a seatbelt if that were the case. They also caught glimpses of the road behind him and saw him turn his head as he changed lanes. *D.Telgraph*, 16 April; *Guardian*, 8 May 2021.

CRYING OFF

For the second year running, the annual British Town Crier Championships have been cancelled due to Covid. Normally the event sees hundreds of town criers from across the UK gather to yell their traditional "Oyez, oyez" call and deliver a pithy news summary. There were plans for contestants to compete via video, but some found it difficult to make good quality recordings, so instead this year's contest is going to be totally silent. Participants now need to submit a written version of their shouts – a maximum of 140 words on the subject of nature and the environment – for consideration. Current champion Alistair Chisholm said: "The composition side of the town crying is a skill in itself, so it is a good alternative way of judging a competition." *Sun*, 21 April 2021.

SIDELINES...

PASTRY PICASSO

Confectioners and pastry chefs from the Basque region of Spain have created an edible version of Picasso's *Guernica* from 1,102lb (500kg) of chocolate. The 24.6ft-by-11.4ft (7.5m by 3.5m) replica of the 1937 painting was made to celebrate the 85th anniversary of the bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War. It is being kept in a temperature-controlled room at the Reina Sofia art museum in Madrid before touring Spain, Germany and France. [UPI] 5 May 2021.

RHEAS ON THE LOOSE

Up to 20 rheas have been running around Maple Cross housing estate in Hertfordshire, close to the M25. Police and local officials were trying to "come up with a plan". Failing to identify the owners, they concluded the flightless birds were effectively wild, and advised the public to steer clear, as they were "aggressive if cornered". *BBC News*, 26 Mar 2021.

ANGRY PHEASANT

Postman Kevin Keeler has been repeatedly attacked by a pheasant during his village round at Brooke, near Norwich. Mr Keeler says the male pheasant has flown at him, knocked letters from his hand and pecked at his ankles during his round. He believes the pheasant, who he has nicknamed Mr Angry, is "just being very territorial". *BBC News*, 25 Mar 2021.

YETI CHEERLEADER

Aman Tuleev, 76, governor of Kemerovo region in Siberia until 2018, has admitted faking a yeti to boost tourism. He told an employee to "turn a fur coat inside out and run around shouting". Enthusiasts from around the world visited the Shoria mountains and an international conference was held in the area. Tuleev had previously organised an annual Yeti Day and offered a prize for proving its existence. *D.Mirror*, 10 April 2021.

CANADIAN CRIME

In Porcupine Plain, Canada, police investigating the theft of a pile of fenceposts from a rural property found the missing wood incorporated in a beaver dam. A spokesman described the incident as "extremely Canadian". *Humboldt Journal*, 11 May 2021.



ABOVE LEFT: While India is ravaged by Covid, Mr SV Annand Rao offers to rid the world of the disease through his bizarre form of numerology. ABOVE RIGHT: Senator Andrew Benner, clearly wearing a seatbelt while supposedly inside his house.



STRANGE DAYS

SIDELINES...

QUITE A BUZZ

A low-level humming noise is heard at all hours of day and night around the South Downs National Park in West Sussex. One Pulborough resident said it was "really annoying." Some have suggested the cause is rail works or sewage pumps. Others link it to 'the Hum' – a rumbling noise heard in various locations worldwide by about four per cent of people. *Sun, 18 Mar 2021.*

SADIST JAILED

Gary Martin Davies, 37, made his stepchildren, a primary school-aged brother and sister, take ice baths and stare at a wall for hours. They had to beg for food and sleep on the floor without blankets. He was jailed for five years and 11 months at Carlisle crown court. *Sun, 31 Mar 2021.*

HARD BOILED

Two intruders entered a closed Denny's restaurant in Evansville, Indiana, just after 2am on 22 April, went to the kitchen and made themselves eggs, then left. They then returned about an hour later and cooked some more eggs before being confronted by an employee. The restaurant estimated the total loss from the incident at "about \$1", the cost of the eggs. The intruders, though, could still be charged with theft and criminal trespass if caught. *BoingBoing, 26 April 2021.*

GIANT SPIDER

A giant spider thought extinct, described as "perfectly camouflaged and largely nocturnal", has been rediscovered on an Army range on MoD land in Surrey. The 2in (5cm) great fox-spider – which shoots venom into its prey, dissolving organs – had not been seen since 1993. *Sun, 31 Oct 2020.*



MARTIN ROSS

BRING OUT YOUR DEAD!

Or, as in some of these cases, don't...



ABOVE: Amy Carlson, leader of the Love Has Won group, was found partly mummified and festooned with fairy lights.

"MOTHER GOD" DIES

The mummified remains of cult leader Amy Carlson, 45, known as "Mother God" by members of her Love Has Won spiritual group, were found at a house in the remote Colorado town of Moffat after the property was searched by deputies. The body was found in a sleeping bag, partly mummified. It had glitter around the eyes and was festooned with fairy lights. "The mummified remains appeared to be set up in some type of shrine" said police. Foul play is not suspected, but they believe that Carlson had been dead for some time, possibly up to a month.

Police were alerted to the bizarre shrine after group member Miguel Lamboy walked into a police station and told them that members of the group were keeping Carlson's body in his house. Lamboy said that he had come home on 27 April to find five fellow Love Has Won members waiting for him, saying they needed a place to stay. He left, but when he returned the next day, he saw the corpse and tried to leave with his son, but his visitors would not let him take the child with him, so he went to the police.

Carlson was last seen alive by a friend of her mother, Linda Haythorne, on 10 April in California. In early May, Love Has Won posted a statement and a video to the group's Facebook page announcing that Carlson

She maintained she had lived as Jesus and Marilyn Monroe

had "ascended", but the page has subsequently been deleted. In Moffat, police found a Nissan SUV with the back-passenger seat laid down as if a corpse had been placed on it and Lamboy says he believes the vehicle was used to drive Carlson's body from California to Colorado.

Followers of the group looked to Carlson as their spiritual leader. She maintained that she was divine and had lived 534 lives, including as Jesus Christ and Marilyn Monroe. She believed she could heal people of cancer and was seen by her group as a "paradigm" for bringing peace on Earth. Families of members, though, accused her of brainwashing people and stealing from them. Both police and former members have described the group as a cult. Haythorne, while accepting her daughter's responsibility for leading Love Has Won, said she believes her daughter was brainwashed by others long before she became a cult leader herself: "She was a victim in the beginning, and then it just developed over time". Carlson's sister, Chelsea

Renninger, said: "Even though she wasn't innocent in all this, she didn't deserve to die the way she did." Four men and three women ranging in age from 30 to 52 years old have been charged with abusing a corpse and child abuse. *Washington Post, 5 May; D.Telegraph, 6 May 2021.*

DISMEMBERED DAD

Police in Soka, a town in Japan's Saitama prefecture, were called out to check on the welfare of an elderly resident who hadn't been seen in the last few years. An officer was sent to the man's condominium, which he shared with his 55-year-old son, and during a search of the residence found a dead body in the attic which had been chopped into pieces.

The son, Akira Ishidoya, told police that his father had died at home some years ago, but he had not reported the death for fear of being accused of the man's murder. Instead, he left the corpse in the condominium while continuing to live there. In May 2019, the building's owner was considering putting it up for auction, which necessitated in-house inspections; to keep his father's death a secret, Ishidoya decided to hide the body in the attic. "But the body wouldn't fit, so I had to cut it into pieces," he explained.

Examination of the body revealed no signs of trauma or injury aside from the cuts made



ABOVE: Che Lewis, outside the funeral home and atop a hearse. BELOW: David Boltwood's body posed a problem for his flatmate.

in chopping it up. Although their investigation is still ongoing, police currently believe Ishidoya's father most likely died of illness or other non-violent causes, so the son has not been charged with murder. He was, however, arrested for the abandonment and dismembering of a corpse. *soranews24.com, 5 Nov 2020.*

KEEPING MUM

A 48-year-old Tokyo woman was arrested early this year after the body of her dead mother was found in a freezer in her apartment. The corpse, discovered by a cleaner, had been bent in order to fit inside the appliance. Yumi Yoshino, who had been forced to leave the apartment due to unpaid rent, told police that 10 years ago she had found her mother dead and had concealed the body because she "didn't want to move out" of the home they shared. The frozen cadaver bore no visible wounds and authorities were unable to determine the time and cause of death. *BBC News, 30 Jan 2021.*

DUMPSTER OF THE DEAD

A Canadian man was placed under house arrest after leaving his roommate's body next to a dumpster. Shane Brownlee, 52, of Kamloops, British Columbia, had been hiding the body of his 65-year-old roommate David Boltwood inside the apartment for several weeks, before leaving the corpse rolled up in a carpet next to the dumpster unit, where it was found on 29 November 2019. Police initially suspected homicide, but an autopsy later



determined that Boltwood had died of natural causes.

Brownlee had invited Boltwood, who was homeless and had health problems, to stay with him in his apartment in October 2019. Brownlee told the court how he had returned home one day to find Boltwood had died, explaining that he had panicked and wrapped Boltwood in a rug, which he later placed in a large cardboard box. He kept the body in his home and in a storage locker before eventually disposing of it outside, with the help of a teenager who was unaware what he was moving. In mitigation, Brownlee acknowledged that he had made a series of bad decisions, but argued that his judgment had been clouded by extreme anxiety and other ongoing health issues, compounded by a pending addiction to alcohol and marijuana, fear of being blamed for Boltwood's death, and anxiety about going back to jail. Brownlee had previously done

time for property crimes. He was given a two-year conditional sentence order and six months' probation for interfering with a dead body. He will spend the next six months under 24/7 house arrest, must attend treatment programmes, refrain from drug and alcohol use, complete 50 hours of community service, and write a letter of apology to Boltwood's family. *thestar.com, 26 Mar 2021.*

DEAD MAN SITTING

A funeral was subject to criticism from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service who said they were "disappointed with the reckless behaviour engaged in by a funeral home." A hearse bearing the bodies of Che Lewis and his father headed a procession that drove around the capital, Port of Spain, with Che Lewis seated in an armchair on top of the hearse along with a sound system playing music. A family member praised the funeral home, saying "the embalmers did a fantastic job, because he stayed in the upright position throughout, despite the tropical heat, and looked so alive. Sadly, because of his unusual presentation, the church authorities wouldn't allow Che within, so he had to sit in his chair outside while his funeral took place within."

The T&T Police Service spokesman stressed that "carrying persons, deceased or otherwise, in a dangerous manner is an offence against Regulation 38, Rule 17 of the Motor Vehicle Road Traffic Act." *Trinidad Express, 25 Nov 2020.*

SIDELINES...

LOVE BOMB

A German bomb squad called to investigate a suspected hand grenade in a Bavarian forest found that the object was a rubber sex toy. A jogger found a bag containing the device in a forest outside Passau and alerted the police, who determined it was a rubber grenade replica; condoms and lubricant in the bag helped point to the device's intended use. "An Internet search confirmed the suspicion," said a police spokesman. *Guardian, 27 April 2021.*

BIRTHDAY WONDER

On 8 April 2021 French footballer Antoine Griezmann celebrated the birth of his third child with his partner Erika Choperina, a girl named Alba, beating the odds of 133,000-1 as she was born on the same date as Griezmann's other two children. His elder daughter Mia arrived on the 8 April 2016 and his son Amaro on the same day in 2019. *Sun, 9 April 2021.*

GAIA SURVIVAL STRATEGY

Human sperm counts in the West plummeted by 59% between 1973 and 2011, leading to drastic birth rate reduction. Since the planet's crises are largely caused by human over-population (choked by plastic, mass extinctions etc), maybe Gaia is gearing up to cull *Homo sapiens*. *Guardian, 27 Feb 2021.*

COPPER LOAD OF THIS

Commodities trader firm Mercuria Energy Group arranged to buy 10,000 tonnes of copper blister, an impure form of the metal, for \$36m. About 6,000 tonnes was loaded for delivery to China, but before setting sail from a port near Istanbul, the copper was found to have been switched with paving stones spray-painted to resemble the semi-refined metal. Bietsan Bakir, the Turkish firm which sold Mercuria the copper, has not responded to requests for comment. *BBC News, 10 Mar 2021.*

TALENTED HOUND

Joshua Ponsford, 23, from Bristol, was prosecuted by the RSPCA and banned from keeping pets for five years after "verbally abusing" Lulu, his Rottweiler – seeming to imply the RSPCA thinks the pet understood English. *D Telegraph, 16 Nov 2020.*



STRANGE DAYS

SIDELINES...

LONG SHOT

Helene Zlotnick visited a small business in Cornwall to sell advertising space. While chatting to the proprietor, a friend of his dropped by. It transpired that the friend came from Cheltenham, like Ms Zlotnick. "You weren't, by any chance, born in the Sunnyside nursing home?" she asked in zest. Yes, he was – and on the same day as her, 4 July 1941. *Eve Standard*, 23 Jan 1984.

URBAN NIGHTMARE

Leonard Shoulders, 33, was waiting for a bus in the Bronx, New York, on 24 October 2020 when the pavement collapsed and he dropped almost 15ft (4.6m) into a sinkhole teeming with rats. He broke his arm and leg and dared not yell in case rats entered his mouth. It took half an hour to rescue him. *D.Telegraph*, 31 Oct 2020.

NAME GAMES

A cat belonging to Georgia Careless in Wells, Somerset, has been nicking clothing from neighbours. Meanwhile, Johanna Tooth, 37, from Cornwall, won £5,000 compensation for botched dental treatment. *Metro*, 27 Nov; *D.Mirror*, 22 Aug 2020.

SPACE POLITICS

Last December, the *Jerusalem Post* reported, with a commendably straight face, a claim by retired Israeli general Haim Eshed that US military leaders had been in touch with a Galactic Federation of space aliens. At the bottom of the article, the *Post* noted that it was "unable to reach out to this supposed Galactic Federation for comment." *Private Eye* #1537, 18 Dec 2020.



BON APPÉTIT |

For some people, sitting down to a balanced meal can be an exercise in fear and loathing



ABOVE: Zachary Twigger spent 10 years eating nothing but Dairylea cheese sandwiches.

ANTHONY MARIC / SWNS

- After a difficult break-up, Michaela Harris, 23, a mother of three from Middlesbrough, was diagnosed in 2016 with avoidant restrictive food intake disorder. All food makes her gag – apart from chicken nuggets and crisps. After four years, she weighs just 73lb (33kg) and worries she may lose her sight (a common side effect of the disorder) or even die. *Sun*, 11 Aug 2020.

- Jenny Edgar's eating disorder had the opposite effect, making her balloon to 247lb (112kg). For more than 20 years, the 32-year-old health centre receptionist from Coventry ate only pasta, chips, cheese, biscuits and dry cereal. Meat, vegetables and fruit made her gag. Preparing for her forthcoming marriage in March this year, she visited hypnotherapist Russell Hemmings, and was cured after six sessions. *Sun*, 28 Aug 2020.

- At the age of 18 months, Zachary Twigger developed neophobia – fear of trying something new. For the next 10 years he would eat nothing but Dairylea cheese sandwiches. He developed type I diabetes and was losing weight, so in desperation his mother Becky, 38, from Coventry, took him to hypnotherapist David Kilmurry. After a two-hour session, Zachary ate his first cooked meal, a roast

dinner with all the trimmings. His dependence on the triangular silver slices was finally foiled. *Metro*, *Sun*, *D.Mirror*, 3 Sept 2020.

- Ben Simpson, 15, from Swansea, lived all his life on four sausages washed down with water. He too was cured after a two-hour session with David Kilmurry – as was Martha Davies, 10, from Coventry, who lived solely on Warburton's medium sliced white bread, toasted, and the occasional handful of BBQ Pringles. We're amazed she was still alive after a decade of such meagre fare. *Sun*, 22 Sept; *D.Mirror*, 7 Oct 2020.

- Since childhood, factory worker Jordan Dean, 25, from Carlisle, had survived on jam sandwiches. The only other foods he would eat were cheese slices, biscuits and crisps. He didn't even know how to use a knife and fork. Then he read about Kilmurry's cures and after a session with him he now has a normal diet. *Sun*, 6 Jan 2021.

- Six-year-old Jessica Jones developed a food phobia when her mother Lesley tried to move her onto solids as a baby. From that point on, Jessica refused to eat anything but chicken nuggets. "We had been on holiday to Turkey and she went a whole week without eating because they didn't do chicken nuggets

there," said Lesley. Doctors seemed unable to help, but a hypnotherapist said Jessica had Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder; following a session with David Kilmurry (him again!), Jessica managed to move on to chicken fillets, apples and grapes. *D.Mirror*, 23 Oct 2020.

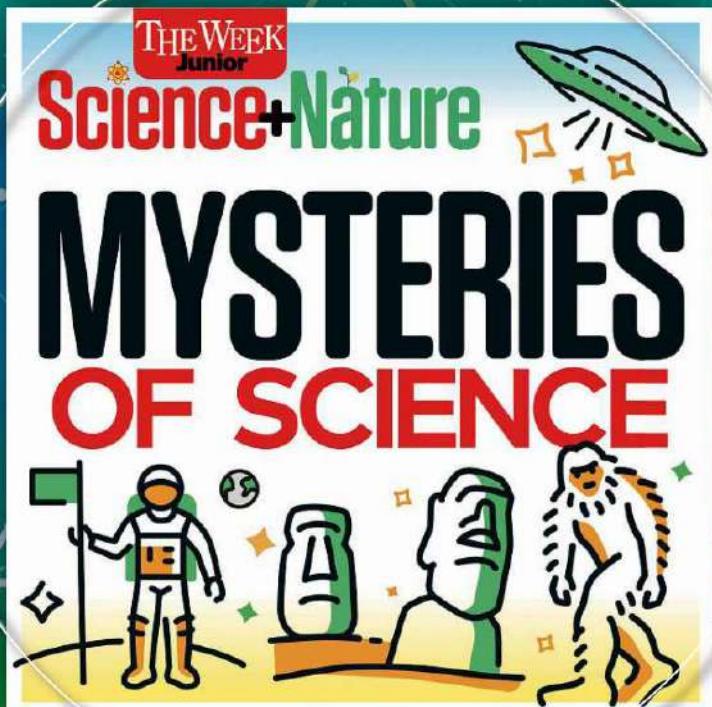
- Caitlin Brennan, 24, a nail technician from Bristol, can't stand vegetables and eats only beige foods. She lives off fish fingers, chicken nuggets, skinless sausages, quiche, pasta and rice. The only fruit she eats is apples, which have to be peeled and chopped up. Maybe someone should tell her about Kilmurry... *Sun*, 10 Mar 2021.

- Nick Carson, 62, from Lowestoft, suffers from auto brewery syndrome, a disorder that causes his body to turn carbohydrates into alcohol. He developed ABS in 2003 after being exposed to strong chemicals while at work, but it took him years to be diagnosed, after his wife saw the condition on an episode of TV drama *Doc Martin*. He craves Victoria sponge cake, which leaves him so drunk he can pass out. *D.Star Sunday*, 10 Jan 2021.

For some disgusting delicacies guaranteed to put sensitive types off their food, turn to p6.

NEW PODCAST

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The “marijuana frequency”

DAVID HAMBLING asks if Elizabeth Rauscher discovered the truth about radio waves and the brain

An eccentric scientist's notebooks may hold the key to stimulating the brain with radio waves, a technique that might make for powerful covert weapons as well as therapeutic tools.

There is a growing suspicion that electromagnetic antipersonnel weapons are not only feasible, but are already being used for harassment. A CIA investigation tasked with looking at 'Havana Syndrome', which struck US and Canadian diplomatic staff in Cuba (see p21) has expanded its scope to include other incidents around the world. The working assumption is that these cases, involving nausea, disorientation, memory loss and hearing damage, were caused by a microwave beam.

There were plenty of scientific attempts to influence human brains with radio waves from the 1960s onwards; these made little visible progress, though they gave rise to that mocking signifier of the conspiracy culture, the tinfoil hat. But the late Dr Elizabeth Rauscher, who died in 2019 at the age of 82, may have discovered the answer.

Rauscher was a distinguished physicist who worked at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, the Stanford Research Institute, and NASA. She was also interested in the paranormal and psychic phenomena, and some called her a hippy. She dabbled in bioelectromagnetics with her co-researcher husband, Dr William Van Bise, and claimed they could produce a wide range of effects. These have not been replicated but appear consistent with recent studies of subtle brain effects observed under laboratory conditions.

Rauscher and her husband had a freewheeling style and used themselves as guinea pigs. One frequency modulation supposedly promoted sleep and cured Rauscher's insomnia. A different modulation made people want to leave the room; the couple used this to protect their expensive home lab equipment from burglars. There was also what Rauscher termed a "marijuana frequency" which made everything hilarious. Van Bise exposed Rauscher and a colleague before they went out for a meal: "Vernon, Bill and I are just laughing our heads off as we drove to go to a restaurant," Rauscher recounted in a 2011 interview. "So we sit in Denny's and we're laughing and acting very stoned. I was kind of enjoying it, except for the nauseous side effect."

Rauscher was anti-war but believed the technology might be a non-violent alternative



to traditional weapons, a way of peacefully subduing rioting mobs. The "marijuana frequency" could end violent conflict, making people forget about fighting.

The public archives of Rauscher's work reveal previously unseen weapon proposals for the US Army. These include a rifle-mounted device with a range of 100 metres (328ft), and larger tank and helicopter versions. These would be silent and invisible in operation, temporarily disabling opponents with nausea, muscle contractions and "other effects".

The archives do not include any details of which modulated frequencies produce which brain effects. These details are believed to be recorded in her laboratory notebooks, which are yet to be published. Rauscher's secrecy was apparently due to pressure from Paul Tyler of the US Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute. "When I gave talks on it, I was threatened with a guy who was head of Navy research for the whole Navy, Paul Tyler," Rauscher said decades later. "If I spoke on my research... they would destroy my work and my life."

Tyler was also on the track of disrupting brain function with radiofrequency beams. "EM [electromagnetic] systems would be used to produce mild to severe physiological disruption or perceptual distortion or disorientation," she wrote in a 1986 report. "The ability of individuals to function could be degraded to such a point that they would be combat ineffective."

That certainly suggests the "marijuana frequency". However, Tyler could not persuade the Navy to fund the unproven technology. According to both Rauscher and Tyler, the effects depended on modulated fields with multiple frequencies. The number of combinations is astronomical, and finding one that worked would require either a lucky hit or some particular insight into the processes involved. This is typical

LEFT: Equipment in Elizabeth Rauscher's lab.

of bioelectromagnetics, where results are elusive and hard to reproduce. It does not help that quacks offer alternative therapies based on electromagnetic effects that are on a par with crystal healing and homeopathy.

Boris Pasche of Wake Forest University spent decades exploring radio-frequency effects. In the 1990s he carried out peer-reviewed, double-blind tests showing that 27 MHz modulated radio waves can help treat insomnia, echoing Rauscher's sleep-improving claims. However, the effect appears to be mild, only working on some patients some of the time.

Chinese researchers may have provided another piece of the puzzle in 2017. Scientists from the Fourth Military Medical University at Xi'an showed that a pulsed electromagnetic field triggered nerve cells to produce endocannabinoids, natural cannabis-like chemicals. In 2019, the same institution showed that they could reduce depression in rats by enhancing endocannabinoid activity with pulsed fields. Again, this hints strongly at Rauscher's "marijuana frequency".

Rauscher's work may come to nothing. Without properly controlled, double-blind tests on a large number of subjects, any new technique needs to be treated with caution. If her claims are accurate, not just the result of suggestibility and the placebo effect, then she may have found modulations giving strong and repeatable results. This could open the way to drug-free therapy. Endocannabinoids might treat everything currently treated by marijuana, but without the side effects, all at the flick of a switch and without the need for a supply of drugs.

The claims can only be tested if we know the frequencies and modulations that Rauscher discovered. Otherwise, researchers would be effectively spinning the dials of a combination lock hoping to find the right number. The answers presumably lie in Rauscher's laboratory notebooks. These were supposedly being digitised for publication after her death, but nothing more has been heard of them. Of course, if the US military establishment actually believes her claims, then they may be suppressing the information, just as Rauscher said they did in her lifetime. This leaves the tantalising possibility that the truth about radio-frequency devices really is out there – but is being covered up.



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

260: FALLEN IDOLS

(See also the entertainingly instructive essay by Christopher Dickenson in *History Today* 70.8, August 2020, available online. I am leaving out tales of bleeding and sweating statues, covered in FT145:18, though will stick in the statue of Victory that turned around in flight, presaging Boudicca's/Boudicea's British rebellion)

"Frank Bruno had the physique of a Greek statue, but with fewer moves" (Andrew Harrison, *The Queensberry Rules*, 28 Nov 2014, online)

I write this piece at a time when statue-toppling is all the rage. As usual, no shortage of ancient precedents.

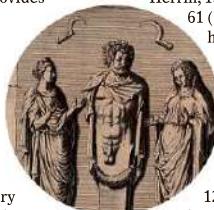
The classical topplers were spoilt for choice. The cities teemed with targets. Pliny (*Natural History*, bk 36 ch4) provides a large inventory. Dickenson estimates (e.g.) around 3,000 in Athens and Rhodes. There was a particular abundance of statues of athletes, which says something about the tastes of the times. Also, enormous private collections, such as the one owned by Byzantine functionary Lausus, destroyed in AD 475. The contemporary public Baths of Zeuxippus had effigies of 80 individuals ranging from mythological figures to poets to emperors. A detailed catalogue is furnished by Alan Cameron, 'Palladas', *Wandering Poets*, 2016, 93-101.

Ancient statues, it should be remembered, were either made of various metals or of marble. Some individuals went wildly overboard, for example the Greek ruler Demetrius of Phalerum (c. 350-280 BC) erected 360 to himself, all subsequently torn down, some tossed into the sea, others melted down to make chamber-pots – a common fate of such monuments: Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, bk5 ch5.

Various Greek and Roman sources report how Dionysius (tyrant of Syracuse, fourth-century BC) ripped off the gold cladding of a statue of Zeus because it was too hot for the god in summer, too cold in winter.

Thucydides (bk6 ch27) reports how (416 BC) many statuettes of Hermes were nocturnally mutilated (Aristophanes naturally emphasises genital damage), casting a shadow over the just-planned great invasion of Sicily.

Similar damage was frequently wrought on the garden statues (phallic garden gnomes) of Priapus, on which women were frequently alleged to satisfy themselves.



Pausanias (*Description of Greece*, bk6 ch11 para9) tells of a man from Thasos who nightily whipped a statue of the famous Olympian athlete Theagenes until it wearied of this, fell on the man and killed him – Memo to modern statues under attack...

The statue was tried for murder, condemned, and thrown into the sea, but later retrieved, this being deemed necessary to restore the state to prosperity. Theagenes has another last laugh: the island's football team is named after him.

Many centuries later, an eighth-century AD guidebook to the statues of Constantinople (edited with English translation by Averil Cameron & Judith Herrin, 1984 – cf. my review in *Speculum* 61 (1986, 388-90) – reports (ch28) how a statue took offence at a civil servant, fell and crushed him to death.

Statues naturally varied in height. The most ardent topplers would have found the Colossus of Rhodes beyond them, likewise the 120ft (36m) effigy of Nero, the size of which gave rise to the name of Colosseum for the Flavian Amphitheatre, thanks to the surviving decapitated head.

Not always easy work demolishing a statue. In February 1991, in Tirana, it took 5,000 people an hour to bring down the 30ft (9m) monument of late communist dictator Enver Hoxha.

The most dramatic Roman account of such events is Juvenal's (*Satire* 10, vv55-64, left out of Johnson's famous imitation *The Vanity of Human Wishes*). It describes the destruction of the statue of Sejanus, praetorian prefect of Tiberius, nicknamed by him 'Partner of My Labours', second most powerful man in Rome. He suddenly fell from grace in AD 31, and was summarily arrested and executed – one thinks of what befell Beria after Stalin.

(Sejanus was played by Patrick Stewart in the television series *I, Claudius*. Read also Ben Jonson's play *Sejanus His Fall*, 1603)

Juvenal, who elsewhere (1.136-7) recommended that people (his words) both piss and shit on the statue of Jewish-born prefect Tiberius Julius Alexander, penned this lively account, as translated in Peter Green's Penguin:

*The ropes are heaved, down come the statues,
Axes demolish their chariot-wheels, the*

unoffending

*Legs of their horses are broken. And now
the fire*

*Roars up in the furnace, now flames hiss
under the bellows:*

*The head of the people's darling grows red
hot, Sejanus*

*Crackles and melts. That face only
yesterday ranked*

*Second in all the world. Now it's so much
scrap-metal*

*To be turned into jugs, basins, frying-pans,
chamber-pots.*

As seen, a common statutory fate. The epigrammatic poet Palladas (4th century AD) laughs (*Greek Anthology*, bk9 no773) at a Cupid melted down into a frying pan, suitable fate for a deity that inflamed human passions.

The same episode would of course be differently treated by a satiric poet and a terse sardonic prose historian. Thanks to a large gap in his *Annals* manuscript, we don't have Tacitus' version. However, there is another such incident where comparisons are possible. At *Annals* 14. 60, he simply mentions that mobs tore down the statues of Nero's mistress Poppaea in support of his young, soon-to-be-executed wife Octavia. However, there is a play *Octavia* (by Seneca or not is a long-running debate) that contains this exuberant description (vv806-14, as translated in WS Watling's Penguin):

*That is their desperate policy, which now
Fills them with fire and urges on their haste
To acts of madness. Every graven image,
Each polished bronze or gleaming marble
statue*

*Bearing the features of Poppaea, lies
Demolished by the mob or overturned
By iron weapons, the dismembered limbs
Are being dragged away with knotted ropes.
Kicked, trampled under foot, and fouled
with dirt,*

*With insults added to these injuries
With words such as I dare not here repeat.
They are about to ring the emperor's house
With fire...*

These Tacitus-Octavia passages are analysed in an online anonymous essay, 'A Riot of Images: Statue Destruction and Historiography In Nero's Rome'. Time, I think, for this column to melt away. If you still want more, consult the characteristic massive list of primary references in JEB Mayor's note on 10.58 in his edition of Juvenal. For marginal conclusion, I recall Winston Churchill's (himself under statuary threat) description of Mussolini as 'Hitler's utensil', along with Fort's remark (Books, p8): "Venus de Milo. To a child she is ugly."



Spectres on the stage

With venues still closed, ALAN MURDIE explores the many hauntings reported from British theatres

"Of all the professions, none, I believe is more interested in this question of another world than the theatrical." So declared Elliot O'Donnell (1872-1965) in one of the few uncontested statements the veteran ghost-seer ever uttered. What O'Donnell wrote more than a century ago remains true today.

In January 2021 actress Dame Judi Dench spoke of glimpsing a ghost at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in London on the morning of 5 October 1998, when the theatre was hosting a memorial service for actor Michael Denison.

"I was walking down the stairs to the stalls and saw somebody in a black tailcoat run down in front of me. And then at the bottom there was nobody there at all. But a lot of people say they've seen ghosts at the Haymarket, or at theatres all over. Ralph Richardson was certain that he did. And it makes perfect sense to me. There's always a lot of spirits in the theatre, I think." Appropriately, Dennison himself had been interested in Spiritualism, enjoying membership of the Ghost Club with his wife and co-star Dulcie Gray.

Dame Judy proved somewhat reluctant to discuss the topic further when pressed by a reporter from the *Guardian* (a newspaper which has a smug tendency to deride modern ghost experiences in a superior and dismissive tone). She admitted a fear of facing ridicule because "people will think she's gone daft" (*Guardian*, 22 Jan 2021).

Such scoffing over the paranormal is ill-placed. One who certainly does not consider her 'daft' is Nick Bromley, a professional theatre company manager who has met many major and minor stars of the stage in theatres great and small around the country during the last 50 years. In a new book, *Stage Ghosts and Haunted Theatres* (2021), he details how many in the acting world have experiences relating to the



LEFT: London's Haymarket Theatre, where Dame Judi Dench (below) had her unnerving encounter.

"I saw somebody in a black tail coat run down in front of me... at the bottom there was nobody there at all"



next. Hearing of first-hand encounters from such luminaries as Martin Shaw, Patrick Stewart, Samantha Bond, Lynda Baron and Richard Eyre, all convince him that strange events occur. His book supplies a selection of some of the profession's strangest ghostly encounters, offering a unique insider perspective that overflows with his own passion for stagecraft.

Spontaneous encounters with phantoms are not limited to professional and amateur performers in the spotlight. Experiences are also often shared by less prominent but equally essential and 'invisible' staff working behind the scenes – the technicians, engineers, stagehands and dressers, prompters, ushers and vendors.

With a nod to the schematic production of plays and theatregoer programmes,

the book is divided into 'Three Acts'. In the first, Bromley reviews 21 theatres in London's theatre-land. 'Act Two' encompasses 17 haunted theatres in the provinces, and for the 'Grand Finale' he zeros in on two most celebrated haunted London playhouses: Sadler's Wells and the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, the latter boasting a catalogue of ghost experiences and stake-outs dating back more than 80 years.

Nick Bromley

recounts his own personal experience while working on *Prick Up Your Ears*, a play about Joe Orton and Kenneth Halliwell, at the Harold Pinter Theatre in 2009. This production was dogged by accidents and misfortunes, amid which he came to suspect that a malicious entity, perhaps the spirit of Orton, a notorious practical joker in life, might be at work. Then one night, having typed up the nightly show report and pressed send, his computer screen went blank. He writes: "I clicked the keyboard again in frustration and then a message appeared. We all stared at it in disbelief but there it was before our eyes. It simply read: 'It wasn't me.'"

Outside the capital, at the Theatre Royal Margate, actors and staff have seen the ghost of Sarah Thorne, who ran the theatre in the late 19th century. In 1934, during rehearsals, an actor screamed after spotting an apparitional form leaning over one of the boxes, waving its arms. Another actor rushed out of the circle bar, saw the same vision and fainted.

The Lyceum Theatre at Crewe claims at least five ghosts. The first theatre on the site was originally established in 1881 but was destroyed by fire in 1910. Rebuilt soon after, in its current incarnation it is haunted by a ballerina, a scent of lavender, a monk, a little girl and a poltergeist called 'Charlie'. The Grand Opera House, Belfast, has an unidentified



ABOVE LEFT: Patrick Stewart appears with Ian McKellen in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* at the Haymarket in 2009; Stewart saw a mysterious figure appear on the stage. BOTTOM: Actor-manager JB Buckstone, whose shade has been seen in the theatre on many occasions. ABOVE RIGHT: The Theatre Royal, Bath. BELOW: It was here, in 1975, that Anna Neagle appeared in *The Dame of Sark*, during one performance of which a ghost caused panic among the audience.



lady and a phantom film projectionist (dating from a stint in the 1960s when it was used as a cinema) and a ghostly face that stared through a staircase window. At the Grand Theatre, Swansea, a woman in a dazzling white dress appears accompanied by the smell of violets – and ghostly harp music has been heard.

Topping the league for the accolade of 'most haunted' provincial venue is probably the Theatre Royal, Bath, with its 'Grey Lady'. In 1975 during a performance of *The Dame of Sark* starring Anna Neagle, the ghost caused panic among the audience. What was described as a column of whirling smoke appeared next to the actress. She backed away from it as it solidified; cast and audience all seeing it 'take the shape of a woman' in period attire. The experience was apparently a collective one, though one might wish for more corroboration on this claimed aspect.

What can account for this recurring proliferation of theatre ghosts? A cynical bid for media attention might be suspected of some claimed ghosts. But although a failing venue or the most narcissistic and neurotic personalities of the stage may crave any attention, do sell-out establishments such as the Haymarket or international stars of the calibre of Judy Dench or Patrick Stewart really need such publicity?

Stewart's much reported ghost sighting of 2009 is a case in point. Engaged in a performance of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* with Sir Ian McKellen, Stewart reported clearly seeing someone with the pair who should not have been there. He recalled: "I was only looking at him for a



few seconds but it was so shocking to me that there was someone on stage with us that the image imprinted itself." The venue has long been notorious for sightings of the shade of a Mr Buckstone, an actor-manager from the Victorian era. If geared purely as a publicity gimmick, something more substantial might have been contrived.

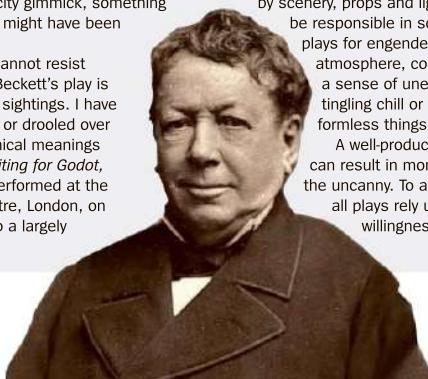
As an aside I cannot resist mentioning that Beckett's play is linked with ghost sightings. I have never been a fan or drooled over alleged philosophical meanings detectable in *Waiting for Godot*, which was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on 3 August 1955 to a largely

unimpressed audience who perceived it as a symptom of national decline ("This is why we lost the colonies," shouted one disgruntled heckler), or simply nonsense.

As it happened, what in my view is a far better night's entertainment was available that fateful night a few miles away in west London, in St Paul's churchyard, Hammersmith, where an optimistic crowd of mostly local young people eagerly awaited manifestations by the infamous 'Hammersmith Ghost'. This followed a rumour that this dread Georgian spectre from 1804 was putting in a 'one night only' appearance as part of a 50-year cycle of returns. A number of people in the crowd that night did believe it duly arrived, albeit in anaemic form compared with 19th century displays, and unlike the titular character of Beckett's pointless play.

If my observation (**FT406:22-25**) that apparitions may be prone to appear to those immersing themselves in the written word with books, poetry and plays is correct, then there will be many receptive witnesses found in theatreland as actors memorise their lines. More broadly, the power of suggestion created by scenery, props and lighting could be responsible in some specific plays for engendering a spooky atmosphere, conjuring a sense of unease or a tingling chill or hinting at formless things.

A well-produced play can result in moments of the uncanny. To an extent, all plays rely upon a willingness to let the





HOSTWATCH

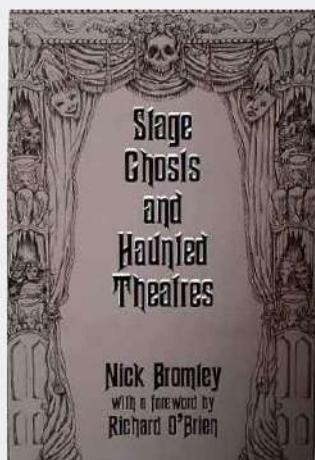
EVERYMAN THEATRE



mind be taken over by artificial impressions and emotions, and such effects can take on a life of their own within the minds of the unduly impressionable and sensitive. Perhaps repetition of a part in some way triggers a sense of another elusive person being present, the creation of a strong impression within the unconscious mind that is later replayed within the mind on a conscious level.

One who understood the effects of suggestion well was Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula*, who spent much of his working life as manager and secretary for the greatest English actor of the 19th century, Sir Henry Irving. Scholars have found this grounding in the theatre reflected in elements of Stoker's immortal novel. Even with its adaptation into a cheesy play by Hamilton Dean in 1924, including a fake bat with flashing eyes powered by an electric battery, performances could weave a powerful spell on the sensitive souls found among provincial audiences in the 1920s and 1930s. The record stood at 17 people fainting at one performance and one pregnant woman going into labour prematurely in the ladies (see *A Biography of Dracula: The Life Story of Bram Stoker* (1962) by Harry Ludlam). Yet suggestion can only take one so far; even experiments at full-blown haunted sites with established reputations such as Hampton Court and the Edinburgh vaults failed to produce anything as dramatic as full apparitional appearances or hallucinations for participants when attempted back in 2003.

I recall a remark of Welsh ghost authority and theatre-goer, the late Revd J Town Jones (1941-2019), noting how buildings which host intense activity during the day, but which become deserted at night, are



The 1924 play included a fake bat with flashing eyes powered by an electric battery

prone to manifestations. He was speaking specifically about haunted factories – and in this regard it should not be forgotten that theatre production is a form of industrial labour that mirrors this pattern, save that the 'empty period' is transferred much later into the night.

Preparing for a play transforms each theatre daily into an active workspace,

LEFT: The Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham; home to Britain's strongest polt? **BELLOw:** Geraldine Beskin of Atlantis Books suggests that theatrical performances act as a form of conjuration. **BELLOw LEFT:** Nick Bromley's new book offers an insider's view of haunted theatres.



ETIENNE GIFFLAR

ahead of the intensely stressful and busiest period as the audience – hopefully a capacity one – arrives. As workspaces, theatres can be hazardous ones too, requiring safe systems in place. Accidents and injuries (sometimes fatal) are far from unknown. Actors, too, have died on stage literally as well as metaphorically.

One of the most extraordinary stories gathered comes from the Everyman Theatre in Cheltenham, where in 1959 a night watchman discovered two huge, unsupported scenery flats, one balanced on top of the other, on the stage at the close of his shift. The flats stood there for a moment before they swayed and came crashing down to the deck. If accurate, this must surely be a contender for the title of 'Britain's strongest poltergeist'!

Helping crystallise further speculations on haunted theatres was a fascinating online talk delivered by Geraldine Beskin, owner of London's most mystical book shop, *Atlantis Books*, for the Ghost Club on 15 May 2021. In this she advanced a number of interesting hypotheses, encouraging a discussion about the idea that theatrical performances are a form of conjuration. Classical theatre in antiquity is believed to have its roots in mystical religious rituals; we might also think of folk-plays in rural areas, long considered 'survivals' of ancient seasonal ceremonies.

The audience is drawn into a world of imagination, where often the words and thoughts of playwrights and authors long-gone are repeated and expressed again. In some plays what once is believed to have happened is being re-enacted, charged with both the emotions of the actors and the recital of words and thoughts of those long dead, again and again. On stage,



ABOVE: The empty auditorium of the Everyman Theatre: "Only when actors and musicians depart does the theatre fall still and relaxation overtake actors and workers. And it is in these quiet moments that ghostly experiences may follow..."

the past and present are represented simultaneously, achieving a merging of thoughts and emotions from different periods.

Before the curtain goes up, the lights dim and expectation is palpable. The curtain rises, the action of the play commences and the audience relaxes and allows itself to be entertained with new sensations and emotions. In contrast, tension and concentration for the performers, technicians and stagehands becomes acute, focusing on the proper performance of their allotted roles and tasks at the right moment. Comparisons with the production of miracles before receptive crowds and the repetitive element in magical rituals at key times may be drawn.

Only when the performance is over and the crowds have departed does the theatre fall still and relaxation overtake actors and workers. And it is in these quiet moments that ghostly experiences may follow.

But there is also a darker side to theatre life, and Geraldine Beskin emphasised the very human side of the acting profession with both its quicksilver triumphs and equally cataclysmic failures. On and off

stage, actors and actresses are known for their sensitive and emotional natures. Drama is not confined to the theatre. Many thespians exist in a state of high tension, surviving on the margins, experiencing intense peaks and troughs of personal emotion, often alone.

On and off stage their lives can be precarious and immensely stressful. Pressure and uncertainty, often exacerbated by spells of unemployment and critical attention from press and public alike, may impact adversely on their self-confidence and encourage volatile mental states. Rates of alcoholism, addiction, anxiety, self-harm, psychiatric illness, relationship failure and suicide can often be high. And like many liminal folk, constantly under stress, they may be prone to superstition, rumour, gossip and paranoia. In his book Nick Bromley notes: "The ghosts are often people who have come to a sad end – suicide, murder, an unhappy affair – and they return to wherever the sadness started or ended."

Furthermore, the interiors of theatres remained largely intact; if there is anything in the idea that memories may be embedded in physical locations (or

some extra dimension intermixed with our perceptual spaces) their relative stability may encourage hauntings. Nick Bromley shared this view in an interview with *The Stage* (10 May 2021):

"Theatres retain memories of the past. I think it's a combination of the vast numbers of people who have attended theatres and the emotions that have been experienced, either through working there or by being in the audience. Ghostly encounters happen out of the blue, when you're least expecting it."

British theatres perhaps come second only to British pubs, inns and taverns in possessing ghosts. Practically every theatre of any age that stands between Land's End and John O'Groats will be found to have one or more ghost stories. You can test this yourself by discretely asking at your own nearest theatre, if it is of any vintage. As theatres and playhouses across the UK begin tentatively to re-open after an immensely difficult period, the resumption of reports of ghostly manifestations is predicted.

Like material theatre itself, one can comfortably anticipate the phantom show will go on.

THE CONSPIRASPHERE



When is a conspiracy theory not a conspiracy theory? When the Wuhan lab leak origin theory of Covid-19 is suddenly rehabilitated by the mainstream media, says **NOEL ROONEY**.

WUHAN FLIP

If Alice were here she might observe that looking glasses and rabbit holes are curiously amenable to two-way traffic. The apparently settled question of how the Covid-19 strain of coronavirus originated has of late provoked a game of rabbit-hole whack-a-mole of global proportions; or perhaps it's a game of pass the parcel, with the parcel labelled 'conspiracy theory'.

At the beginning of 2020, three theories of origin were proposed: that it was a zootonic virus that had jumped from bats (possibly stopping off for a rest on pangolins) to humans; that the virus had somehow infected a 'wet food' market in Wuhan and spread from there; and finally, that it had leaked (or been intentionally spread) from a laboratory where viruses were tested as potential bio-weapons; a laboratory that, embarrassingly enough, received a fair amount of funding from the US.

From the off, the majority of commentators and media outlets treated the first two theories as plausible, and the third as a *conspiracy theory*. This attitude hardened when Donald Trump, a person known to enjoy a *conspiracy theory*, threw his lot in with the lab leak option. If the Donald said it, opined the world's liberal media, and politicians of every shade except red pill right, then it couldn't be true, could it?

A series of investigations by the WHO, assorted scientists and, apparently, various intelligence agencies, concluded that the bats were the culprits, and that the idea of a leak from the Wuhan lab was indeed a *conspiracy theory*. (Incidentally, the market theory bit the dust, very quietly, some time in mid-2020.) So that was that; the bats had won and the bat-sh*t crazies had lost.



If the Donald said it, then it couldn't be true, could it?

Fast forward. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that three technicians from the Wuhan lab were hospitalized in November with "flu-like" symptoms. The *WSJ* also reports that intelligence agencies are now assessing "significant circumstantial evidence" that the outbreak could have been caused by a leak from the lab. Some of you may be thinking that "significant circumstantial evidence" sounds like the kind of thing that *conspiracy theories* are built on. You aren't alone.

This sudden official pivot exposed some interesting anomalies in the new fashion for fact-checking, and the ConspiraspHERE jumped on them with 'told you so' glee. Facebook has reversed its policy of taking down posts naming the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) as a possible source (accidental or otherwise) for the virus; and Politifact, one of the biggest US fact-checking agencies, has retracted its labelling of the theory as 'Pants on fire!' (Yes, that really is how the serious business of fact-checking operates.)

So now we find ourselves in a situation where the people who were labelled *conspiracy theorists* throughout 2020 can justifiably claim that they

had the truth of it all along; and that the people who were claiming the evidential high ground for a year are the real *conspiracy theorists*. They can point to some decidedly ticklish snippets of "significant circumstantial evidence": Dr Anthony Fauci approved funding for the WIV to conduct research into "gain of function" – ie, turning viruses into weapons; Peter Daszak, head of the EcoHealth Alliance, also funded research at Wuhan, and then sat on the commission investigating the origin of the outbreak, a situation some commentators have suggested might conceivably imply a conflict of interests, if not a *conspiracy*.

And of course, if the lab leak theory is back on the table, what of the assertion (reported as scientific fact in the media) that coronavirus has a known natural source? This was described as "96% certain"; but that missing four per cent is a gap wide enough to drive a couple of conspiracies through, side by side. Scott Gottlieb, head of the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) recently suggested publicly that, to date, no definitive proof of animal origin has yet been found. He was quoted in several outlets as saying, "We found no evidence of this virus in an animal anywhere." Gottlieb may not represent the scientific consensus, but he certainly set the cat amongst the conspiracist pigeons.

More worryingly, why are the US and China, publicly understood as enemies, collaborating on what appears to be bio-warfare in a lab at the epicentre of the virus outbreak? And why, in that case, is the US now pursuing the lab leak theory? These are legitimate questions, but to date only the 'conspiracy theorists' seem to be asking them. The concept of goodies and baddies seems to be

suffering a severe case of zoonosis.

So what does this mean for the public perception of 'truth versus *conspiracy theory*'? The social media giants have suffered a deeply embarrassing reversal at the very least; their paternalistic attempt to shield us from the harms of *conspiracy theory* now looks just a little like censorship. Likewise the mainstream news media, who are now earnestly reporting on a story they have spent the last year deriding; what does this step change do to their claims to be arbiters of facts?

Conspiracy theory, having crept gradually into the mainstream, first as an object of ridicule, then as a paper tiger, can now arguably claim to represent a genuine source of truth; a source available to everyone, and not just the tin foil hat brigade. And the well-worn tactic of calling a dissenting view a *conspiracy theory* may just have fallen down a rabbit hole of its own making. If *conspiracy theory* is an infection plaguing the body politic, it is proving every bit as versatile as the virus. And those people who yearn for a world where information is a synonym for facts, and the baddies all wear the same colour hats, may be in for interesting times.

SOURCES: <https://sputniknews.com/world/202105241082985749-evidence-growing-that-novel-coronavirus-originated-in-wuhan-lab-former-fda-chief-claims/www.livescience.com/covid-19-did-not-start-at-wuhan-wet-market.html>; <https://www.counterpunch.org/2021/05/26/what-the-new-acceptability-of-the-lab-leak-origin-tells-us-about-media-outlets/www.informationliberation.com/?id=62247>; <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/372/6543/694.1>; <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/may/27/facebook-lifts-ban-on-posts-claiming-covid-19-was-man-made>



WEIRD ATTACKS

Ageing IT systems leave utilities vulnerable to mystery hackers, while new developments emerge in the 'Havana Syndrome' story

LYE IN THE WATER SUPPLY

In the 1960s and 1970s, it was rumoured that countercultural, psychedelic pioneers had ambitions to lace an entire city's water supply with LSD, as a mass consciousness-raising exercise (see FT262:38-42). In the 21st century, however, attempts to dose water systems have a more sinister aim. In early 2021, a computer hacker gained remote access to the water treatment system for the city of Oldsmar, Florida, which provides water for local businesses and around 15,000 residents. The hacker attempted to pump a "dangerous" amount of sodium hydroxide (lye) into it. Lye is already used in water systems in small amounts to control acidity, but a large amount could cause major problems in the water. Fortunately, a plant operator spotted the increased flow and reduced the lye level back to normal before any harm could be done. No arrests have been made so far, and it is not yet known if the hack was done from within the US or from a foreign country. Oldsmar's mayor, Eric Seidel, said: "There's a bad actor out there." Sodium hydroxide is the main ingredient in drain cleaner. It is highly corrosive and can cause irritation to the eyes and skin, as well as temporary loss of hair. Swallowing it could cause damage to the mouth, throat and stomach, and induce vomiting, nausea and diarrhoea. Local county sheriff Bob Gualtieri said: "I'm not a chemist. But I can tell you what I do know is... if you put that amount of that substance into the drinking water, it's not a good thing."

This is not the first time that such an attack has been attempted. In 2016, a Verizon security report detailed a similar attack on another unnamed US water facility, and in Israel last year, multiple attempts were made to hack into the country's water supplies. Cyber-security experts have been warning of such attacks for years, with threats to all manner of "critical national infrastructure" facilities, including water, electricity and



ABOVE: The Oldsmar, Florida, water system was targeted by an unknown hacker.

transport systems, as well as nuclear power plants. All are said to be potential targets since many are running on out-of-date and vulnerable IT systems. BBC News, 9 Feb 2021.

HAVANA SONIC ATTACKS

The White House is investigating two "unexplained health incidents" affecting US officials in Washington DC after they suffered sudden symptoms similar to those previously experienced by diplomats in Cuba (see FT359:22, 360:14, 363:4, 370:26-27, 382:10-11, 389:26-27, 401:9). There, US and Canadian embassy staff experienced nosebleeds, nausea, dizziness, blurred vision, headaches, hearing loss and speech problems with no obvious cause. The official report on that incident considered things like neurotoxins and mass psychogenic illness, but concluded that the diplomats' symptoms were most likely caused by some form of directed energy device, probably using microwaves. One of the Washington incidents, in which an official from the National Security Council suddenly fell ill, took place last November close to the White House. The other happened in the suburb of Arlington where a White House official walking her dog was affected. In this incident, the woman passed a parked van from which a man got out and walked past her; as he did so, her dog seized up while she felt a high-pitched ringing in her

ears, an intense headache, and a tingling on the side of her face. She had previously experienced similar symptoms in her hotel room during an official visit to London. In a third case on US soil, a couple who had experienced a probable directed energy attack when serving in China reported being targeted again when they visited Philadelphia to get specialised treatment for its aftermath; once again, they heard sounds and felt pressure to their heads, as they had in China; they changed hotels on the advice of the FBI, but the symptoms repeated on the second night. On running to the room where their children were sleeping, they found them moving in their sleep, bizarrely and in unison, after which they, too, developed vision and balance problems.

There have now been more than 130 cases of "Havana Syndrome" reported by US diplomats, 70 more than previously acknowledged. US officials have said that the number of new cases does not necessarily reflect the number of recent incidents – publicity about the syndrome may have led some people to reinterpret symptoms they were suffering as the result of some form of attack they had not previously suspected.

There is suspicion, but no conclusive proof, that Russia is behind the attacks – if, indeed, that is what they are. Cheryl Rofer, a former chemist at Los

Alamos National Laboratory with expertise on microwaves, has publicly voiced scepticism about the idea that some kind of microwave weapon is responsible for the symptoms people are experiencing. "The evidence for microwave effects of the type categorised as Havana Syndrome is exceedingly weak," she said. "No proponent of the idea has outlined how the weapon would actually work. No evidence has been offered that such a weapon has been developed by any nation. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence, and no evidence has been offered to support the existence of this mystery weapon." She points out that the energy requirements of such a weapon are considerable, and while a petrol-powered version might just be able to be made backpack-sized, to operate one using batteries or other power sources would require it to be mounted in a van or a building, which, particularly for attacks on US soil, would be hard for a hostile intelligence agency to do unnoticed by authorities. Even if this were possible, such a weapon's range would be tens of feet rather than hundreds and would be seriously attenuated by walls or other structures.

Elsewhere, there are claims that China deployed a microwave weapon against Indian troops in recent border clashes. In a lecture to students at Renmin University in Beijing, Professor Jin Canrong claimed the Chinese military had forced Indian soldiers to vacate an area by training such a weapon on them from a distance, inducing mass vomiting and a swift retreat. The Indian army dismissed the claim as "fake news"; but Professor Canrong said: "They [India] didn't publicise it... because they lost so miserably." Tobias Elwood, chair of the UK's Defence Select Committee, did not dismiss the idea, saying: "We know the Chinese have been researching and developing these kinds of weapons for some time." GQ, 10 Oct 2020; Mail On Sunday, 22 Nov 2020; Guardian, 29 April, 13 May; Foreign Policy, 10 May 2021.



KARL SHUKER reveals a case of cryptozoological fakery and welcomes back an elusive owl



LEFT: A vintage photo of a hippopotamus in Leningrad Zoo... ABOVE: ...transformed into surprising prehistoric survivor.

WHEN THE CAMERA DOES LIE!

Thanks to the sophistication of readily available digital photo-manipulation programs, photographic evidence for the existence of cryptids is of little worth nowadays. This was readily demonstrated in mid-February 2021, following the widespread circulation online of a close-up, excellent-quality black-and-white photograph seemingly depicting a living deinotherium in some unidentified zoo. Renowned for their huge body size and especially for their diagnostic downward-curving lower jaw and lower tusks – but absence of upper tusks – deinotheres were prehistoric pachyderms distantly related to today's elephants. However, even the most recent fossils of these mega-mammals date back one million years. Clearly, therefore, the existence of a living specimen would be a scientific sensation – but as the scientific world has made no mention of any such prehistoric survivor in captivity, the photo is evidently a fake.

Over the years, I have exposed many fake photos of the cryptozoological kind, in the hope of ensuring that they no longer mislead anyone. The best way of doing this is to uncover the original, genuine photo that the hoaxer has photo-manipulated, which I have successfully achieved on numerous occasions by online research. This time, however, a fellow researcher beat me to it. German cryptozoologist and longstanding friend Markus Hemmer had seen the deinotherium photo before I had and immediately searched online, where he discovered a vintage photo of a hippopotamus living in what was then Leningrad Zoo in the USSR. It was in a 2017 Czech article documenting the hardships that the zoo and its animals had suffered during World War II. A reconstruction of what a deinotherium might have looked like had been deftly superimposed over the hippo,

hiding it completely. Case closed. *Markus Hemmer, pers. com, 14 Feb 2021; www.priroda.cz/clanky.php?detail=2917, 4 Mar 2017.*

KING CHEETAH IN EAST AFRICA?

Ever since its scientific debut in 1926 when a specimen was shot and its ornately patterned pelt saved for formal zoological examination, the normal spotted cheetah's very majestic striped morph, known fittingly as the king cheetah and resulting from the expression of a rare recessive mutant gene allele, has been documented exclusively from a fairly restricted area of southern Africa. Native observers traditionally dubbed it the *nsuifisi* or leopard-hyaena. (A single skin was recorded from Burkina Faso in West Africa, but this may have been taken there from southern Africa, as there is no history of living specimens in West Africa.) However, as I have pointed out in several of my mystery cat writings, a similar-sounding but still-unidentified beast has actually been reported from East Africa in the past, where it was dubbed the *mpisimbi*, which again translates as leopard-hyaena. Might this cryptid have been based upon living specimens of king cheetah? Even if so, it must be long extinct by now, as none has been reported there for many decades – or so I thought. After I mentioned this in the public Facebook group 'Cryptozoology' recently and included a colour picture of a king cheetah, on 6 March 2021 Aurelia Zawadi Doto replied that in 2010 she had seen such a creature in Tanzania. I requested further details and on 11 March she posted on Cryptozoology the following fascinating response:

"This was in Dodoma [Tanzania's capital] around June or July, 2010. Very early in the morning I was waiting for a taxi to come collect me and take me to the bus station as I was travelling. The creature was sniffing around my front

porch. I was looking through the front door windows and saw it. It was scary, though not surprising because I have seen several hyenas and other types of wildlife roam the area in the early morning hours. The houses are located next to a heavily forested area, sooooo..."

The king cheetah is nothing if not distinctive in appearance, so much so that I doubt that it could be confused with anything else, although when Doto first claimed to have seen one, I did wonder if it might have been a striped hyaena *Hyena hyaena*. In her second post, however, she stated that she had seen hyenas, thereby rendering this even less likely. Assuming its veracity, I have no satisfactory explanation. Has the king cheetah mutant allele spontaneously arisen in East Africa's modern-day cheetah population? Or has it always been present, but expressed only very rarely and spasmodically, explaining the mysterious *mpisimbi* of earlier times? There are not enough data to speculate further at present, but Doto's claim is sufficiently noteworthy to warrant documenting here. Facebook's public 'Cryptozoology' group, 6+11 Mar 2021.

BRIGHT EYES IS BACK

Otus brookii brookii, Borneo's very distinct, dark-plumaged representative of the Rajah scops owl, is characterised by its bright orange eyes that burn like fire. However, scientists hadn't seen this Art Garfunkelian-sounding night bird for over a century, not since its original discovery back in 1892, in fact. And as its song was unknown, there were no recognisable aural clues to its continuing existence either. In May 2016, however, a live specimen was photographed in a montane forest of Mount Kinabalu, in the Malaysian state of Sabah in northern Borneo, by ecologist Andy Boyce, at that time a postgraduate student, from the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. Now, in April 2021, his remarkable rediscovery of this exceedingly elusive owl has been formally published in the *Wilson Journal of Ornithology*. <https://bioone.org/journals/the-wilson-journal-of-ornithology/volume-132/issue-3/20-50/Rediscovery-of-Rajah-Scops-Owl-Otus-brookii-brookii-on-the/10.1676/20-50.short>, 28 April 2021; www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/owl-documentary-first-time-more-than-125-years-180977722/, 13 May 2021.





BIRD INVASIONS

Hitchcockian scenes in California, birds behaving badly in Florida, and a very out-of-place vulture on the Kent coast



ABOVE LEFT: A palm-nut vulture takes its ease in a garden in Seasalter, Kent. ABOVE RIGHT: Endangered California condors decided to move onto Cinda Mickols's new back porch, trashing it in the process. BELOW: Chimney swifts live up to their name, forcing a Californian family to leave their home to avoid the swarming birds.

SWIFT INVASION

A family in Torrance, California, were forced out of their home by a flock of birds that swarmed down the chimney and took over the house. Videos on YouTube (https://youtu.be/h5sT4Whhw_M) shows the birds, Vaux's swifts, also known as chimney swifts, wheeling around the house before plunging down the chimney *en masse*. "We lost count at 800," said homeowner Patrick Belleville. Once inside, the birds clung to the ceiling, walls and pictures and crowded at the windows. Despite following Animal Control advice to open all the doors and windows so the birds would leave of their own accord, the family found the swifts refused to depart and were forced to retreat to a nearby hotel for the night. It took a relative three days to evict the invaders, and even after that they continued to find stray birds in cupboards and wardrobes. Many of the family's possessions had to be thrown out after being contaminated with bird droppings. A few days earlier, the same thing happened 100 miles away in Montecito, where a flock of over 1,000 swifts flew down a chimney but were kept out of the house by a metal grille in the fireplace. Firefighters constructed a chute system to funnel the birds to freedom via the house's back door. A protected species, Vaux's swifts are particularly prone to this kind of behavior,



as they often nest in chimneys. *BoingBoing.net*, 29 April 2021; *Los Angeles Times*, 30 April 2021.

CONDOR INVASION

After a weekend away, Cinda Mickols returned to her home in Tehachapi, California, to find 10 per cent of the world's population of endangered California condors hanging out on her porch. The condor population fell to a low of only 27 birds in 1987, but there are now an estimated 200 of the birds after intensive conservation efforts and a captive breeding programme. Twenty of these large birds, which can have a 10-foot (3m) wingspan, had congregated at Mickols's home. This rare wildlife spectacle had a downside as the birds had comprehensively wrecked her new back porch, covering it in excrement, knocking plants



over, shredding the hot tub cover and damaging screen doors. "It looks like there was a party," said Michael Fry, a scientist at the US Fish and Wildlife Service who works on California condor conservation, adding that they "will feed communally, they tussle with each other. They might even play tug of war over a carcass... But I don't know what they were all doing on her deck." *Smithsonianmag.com*, 7 May 2021.

VULTURE INVASION

The Tampa, Florida, suburb of Westchase is also under siege from large carrion-eating birds. An invasion of turkey vultures has been disrupting the district since arriving three years ago, with multiplying numbers creating mess and destruction. Westchase resident Judy Oliveri said "We could have 20 to

25 vultures on our roofs. They land on our screens, their under-feathers are all over the roof, their droppings are all over the place". The vultures are a state and federally protected migratory bird so the residents cannot take action against them without a permit. The Department of Agriculture has promised to remove the birds but is yet to set a timetable. "They are destroying our neighbourhood and our property values. I would like them gone," Oliveri said. *[AP] 13 May 2021.*

KENT VULTURE

Halfway round the world, a resident of Seasalter near Whitstable in Kent had a rather smaller vulture invasion, coming home to find a palm-nut vulture, also known as the vulturine fish eagle, sitting on the back of one of his patio chairs. The bird, a native of Africa, had escaped from a private collection in Essex before crossing the Thames estuary to Kent, where it had taken refuge after being attacked and injured by a mob of seagulls. Mark Habben, from the Wildwood Trust, which runs a nearby wildlife park, came out and rescued the vulture before returning it to its Essex home. "It was certainly an interesting day, and in all these years, I can definitely say I've never had to rescue a palm-nut vulture," he said. *Kentononline.co.uk*, 6 May 2021.



STRANGE DAYS

STRANGE CONTINENT

ULRICH MAGIN rounds up fake news, daft pranks and cases of mistaken identity from across Europe

We are now well into the second year of the pandemic, and less fortean news seems to be reported in the mainstream media; when it is, the stories are often local in nature and don't cross borders. I can't imagine that people in Europe see fewer UFOs or ABCs, or are short of ghosts and poltergeists, but most of what I have assembled here concerns fake news, hoaxes, and silly mistakes. So, this month's instalment is by accident, rather than by design, a bit of light relief.

APRIL FOOLS

Early in April, the Swiss air navigation service provider Skyservice explained in a press briefing that they would open the first "competence centre for UFO activities" in Switzerland. "The perceived rise in sightings of unidentified objects in the airspace monitored by Skyservice has prompted air traffic control to investigate these phenomena more closely.

"The UFO competence centre is to be located in the building of the district control centre in Wangen near Dübendorf and has three employees who specialise in UFOs. Further, an additional workstation will be created in the control towers for a specialised air traffic controller who will focus on observing unusual flying objects."

Personnel were said to have "completed an intense training course in order to be able to cope with future activities. This included recreated UFO activities on the radar and in the tower simulator, but also the viewing of documentary material (such as the Roswell crash or UFO video recordings of the US Navy) as well as the study of spaceships and their flight behaviour in well-known science fiction movies. With this all-round training, Skyservice's UFO experts are able to



ABOVE: The 'iguana' that terrorised the inhabitants of an apartment building in Krakow for two days.

quickly discover and document unidentified objects in flight." However, the date of the press release, was 1 April 2021, and the whole thing was a prank.

Meanwhile, an April Fool's hoax on Facebook caused riots in Brussels, Belgium. Despite lockdown, a huge party was said to be taking place in the city's Bois de la Cambre park. About 2,000 people assembled but were told by police they had to leave as only four people were allowed to meet in parks at the time. Police used water cannon to disperse the crowd, and fighting went on until well into the early hours. *de.euronews.com*, 1 April 2021.

NIGHT OF THE "IGUANA"

In mid-April 2021, in Krakow, Poland, a woman called Animal Welfare because she had seen an iguana staring at her from the branch of a lilac tree, where she said it had been sitting for the last two days. "We don't dare open our windows here

as we fear it might crawl in," the worried caller said. When animal rescuers arrived at the site they found a croissant, the buttery pastry from France. "Our two inspectors were very surprised and amused, it was hard not to be," said a spokesperson for the Krakow Animal Welfare Society. "They didn't expect an iguana, but they weren't prepared for what they saw of course." *Spiegel.de; Vice, 15 April 2021.*

FILM FAKE

Ulrich Larsen is a retired 44-year-old cook who lives outside of Copenhagen. About 10 years ago he contacted director Mads Brügger after seeing his documentary about North Korea. Larsen suggested that he join the Danish branch of the Korean Friendship Association (KFA), a propaganda outlet for North Korea's Kim Jong-un, just to see what happened. So while he was promoting the

dictator's country as a paradise on Earth in Denmark, he was quickly promoted in the ranks of the KFA and recruited by its head, Cao de Benós, whose real purpose was to find investors to bring foreign currency into North Korea. Larsen, with another actor, flew to North Korea, where they posed as wealthy cocaine dealers interested in a lasting commercial relationship with the state; they were offered anti-drone weapon systems and missiles as payment. They suggested to Kim Jong-un a plan to buy an island in Lake Victoria, Uganda, and build a luxury resort there; then, they would actually use the property, in the style of James Bond villains, as a centre for North Korea's traffic in weapons and crystal meth. The whole thing was filmed, and openly so, as Larsen explained to his Korean contacts that he wanted to use some of the material on KFA's YouTube channel. The documentary on this amazing game-playing, called *Der Maulwurf (The Mole)*, was streamed on German TV channel ZDF's website. The press described it as a Borat-style, but highly dangerous stunt. *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger, 9 April 2021.*

MEDIA WHORE

In Germany, a 2020 documentary by director Elke Margarete Lehrenkraus, *Lovemobil*, received the German Documentary Award for its shockingly brutal portrayal of the life of a prostitute, Rita, who works from her van. Then, a German TV programme revealed that many of the incidents shown had been carefully scripted and were not 'real' in the normal sense of a documentary. Lehrenkraus at first fought the accusations, saying the film showed "a reality more authentic than reality" but



finally handed the award back. She was removed from the list for the even more prestigious German Grimme Award.
Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger, 27 Mar; Zeit, 24 Mar 2021.

GRAVE DISCOVERY

A minor mystery posed itself when the skeleton of a five-or-six-month-old foetus was discovered in the 342-year-old coffin of Lutheran bishop Peder Winstrup in Sweden some 10 years ago. "The strange bones have puzzled historians for a long time," said reports, but now scientists from the Centre for Palaeogenetics at Stockholm University have analysed DNA material from the bishop and the additional small bones which had been preserved in a linen cloth, and found a 25 per cent match. The DNA proved the child was a boy and a second degree paternal relative. The researchers assume that the boy was the bishop's grandson. "It is not unlikely that the stillborn boy was the son of Peder Pedersen Winstrup, and that the bishop was his grandfather," said Maja Krzewinska of the Centre for Palaeogenetics. Peder Pedersen Winstrup lost all his property a year after his father died in 1679 and lived on alms. It is assumed he buried his son in his father's coffin as a symbolic gesture. "It was common to lay down little children in the coffins of adults. The foetus was probably put into the coffin after the grandfather's burial, which was in a vault in Lund Cathedral and easy to access," said Torbjörn Ahlström, professor of historic osteology at Lund University. The corpse of Bishop Winstrup is famous in its own right as one of the best-preserved human bodies of the 17th century. His clothing, skin, bones and internal organs were all found to be intact, even after centuries had passed, possibly because air circulation in his coffin had transformed him into a natural mummy. *Web.de, 12 April 2021.*



EEL STRANDING

We are used to mass strandings of whales and porpoises, but Dormagen, on the Rhine in Germany, saw something similar recently with eels. The river had been in spate in February, but when the water levels went down, about 100 dead eels were found hanging in branches of trees and lying on the gravel in a stretch of some 500 yards near Dormagen. The dead animals were discovered by environmental activists, but the official environmental protection agency found no evidence for either disease or pollution and could only suggest the mass death was

somewhat related to the high water levels. Stefan Saas, head of the professional fishermen of the region, said the dead eels were an "uncommon phenomenon" and the animals had probably frozen to death. Similar reports do surface from time to time. The Roman writer on portents, Julius Obsequens, noted of the year 44 BC that "the Padus river flooded the land and when it returned into its bed, it left huge amounts of snakes on the shore." And after weeks of drought "tens of thousands of dead eels" were washed up on the Dutch banks of the Rhine in the summer of 2003. *Stern, 7 Aug 2003; www.tag24.de, 17 Feb 2021.*

LEFT: The naturally mummified body of Bishop Peder Winstrup and the linen-wrapped bundle containing the skeleton of a six-month old foetus.

BODY IN MOTION

Meanwhile, Spanish police were in for a surprise when they finally caught up with a speeding car. On 8 April 2021, a 66-year-old Spanish driver had been stopped at Le Boulon border station between France and Spain and tried to escape, with French and Spanish police in hot pursuit. After travelling 30km (19 miles) in the wrong direction on motorways in France and Spain, he finally crashed on the AP-7 motorway near Jafre in Catalonia. Officers rushing to the site found the heavily decomposed body of his 88-year-old partner, who, it is said, had died from unknown causes. The driver was detained, and it is thought that he had been trying to smuggle the dead body of his partner to his home in Switzerland in contravention of Covid-19 rules. *web.de/magazine, 9 April 2021.*

BIZARRE BOLIDE

"A fireball originating from an asteroid" crossed Andalusia on the afternoon of 13 February. The phenomenon was observed by crowds of witnesses, especially in Malaga, Granada and Almería, who reported their sightings on social media, said astrophysicist Jose Maria Madiedo of the Institute of Astrophysics of Andalusia. A preliminary analysis determined that the fireball started at an altitude of about 95km (60 miles) over the north of Granada, and moved in a south-westerly direction to end at an altitude of about 55km (34 miles) south of the province. Its speed was estimated at 72,000km/h (44,740mph). That a meteor or bolide would originate from "an asteroid" sounds like something out of Velikovsky, but I assume journalistic incompetence rather than sensationalism here. *La Vanguardia, 13 Feb 2021.*



STRANGE DAYS

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

A hefty sentence for Turkey's kookiest crook, plus a solution to Canada's severed feet mystery

TURKISH SEX CULT LEADER JAILED [FT377:46-51]

 Adnan Oktar, leader of a cult considered to be a criminal organisation by Turkish prosecutors, was convicted of various offences in January 2021 and sentenced to a total of 1,075 years and three months' imprisonment by an Istanbul court. Oktar, 64, was among some 236 defendants who had been on trial since September 2019. Oktar and dozens of his followers were arrested in simultaneous nationwide raids in 2018. A 499-page indictment portrayed him and others as a criminal gang involved in blackmail, extortion, money laundering and other crimes, which included political and military espionage, aiding the Gülenist Terror Group (FETÖ), sexual abuse of minors, torture, abduction, illegal wiretapping, fraud, threats, attempted murder and forgery. One of the defendants, Tarkan Yava, was given a 211-year sentence for being a leading member of the group, sexual abuse of a minor, sexual abuse, misstatement of property and committing perjury in an official document. Oktar Babuna, another defendant, was given 186 years in jail for being a member of a gang, sexual abuse of a minor and sexual abuse.

Prosecutors said Oktar's gang had been recruiting and brainwashing young women since the late 1990s. "The organisation used its good-looking members to deceive young girls and women. Those members raped or sexually abused women and were blackmailed first by members pretending that their affairs were recorded on video. They were also brainwashed under the pretext of religious teachings," read part of the indictment. Adnan Oktar first came to public attention in the 1980s when he gained a following among university students, mostly children of Turkey's



ABOVE: Turkish police officers arrest televangelist and cult leader Adnan Oktar on 11 July 2018; he has now been sentenced to more than 1,000 years in prison.

wealthy elite. During this period, he was arrested for promoting a theocratic revolution. After some time in a mental institution and an arrest for cocaine possession, Oktar expanded his cult in the 1990s via his Science Research Foundation which promoted his anti-evolution books. In the 2000s he became nationally famous after founding his own cable TV channel. He also appeared on talk shows where he expounded his unusual views and theories on religion and other subjects, occasionally breaking into dance routines with his good looking followers. He is said to have suggested bikinis may be regarded as a form of Islamic veil, and that vodka is exempt from Islam's prohibition on alcohol.

But state prosecutors claimed Oktar was more than just a promoter of strange religious views and conspiracy theories. Former followers and families of those allegedly brainwashed by the cult came forward during the investigation, telling of threats and blackmail to keep them inside the cult and to submit to Oktar's orders.

Oktar's final defence saw him flatly reject the allegations against him. He denied the accusations of sexual abuse, saying he had "close to 1,000 girlfriends" and had an "overflowing of love for women". One

witness told the court how Oktar had repeatedly raped her and other women, some of whom had been forced to take contraceptives. When asked about 69,000 contraception pills found in his home by police, Oktar said they were used to treat skin and menstrual disorders. He also refuted charges of running a criminal organisation, claiming that he simply had a large circle of friends. As for his alleged links to FETÖ and the espionage charges, Oktar blamed a conspiracy against him by "certain forces". When arrested, he had exclaimed "It's a British plot!" and apparently believes the world is ruled by a shadowy 'British Deep State' of 300 persons, including the Queen and the Pope. *Guardian.com, Guardian, 11 Jan 2021.*

FLOATING FEET [FT345:223; 289:20; 281:11; 278:19; 273:11; 268:22-23; 245:20]

 The mystery of numerous severed feet found washed ashore on Pacific Northwest coastlines appears to have been solved in a new book, *Gory Details: Adventures From the Dark Side of Science* by Erika Engelhardt. In 2007, a 12-year-old girl spotted a lone blue-and-white running shoe on a beach of British Columbia's

Jedediah Island. Inside the shoe was a foot clad in a sock. Six days later, on nearby Gabriola Island, a Vancouver couple came across a black-and-white Reebok with a decomposing foot inside. While it was clear that the feet didn't belong to the same person, both shoes contained right feet and were men's size 12s. The following year, five more feet turned up on nearby Canadian beaches. Over the course of the next 12 years, a total of 15 feet washed ashore in the area around Vancouver Island, a network of waterways called the Salish Sea; six more turned up in Puget Sound, over the US border at the southern end of the sea. Apart from one foot clad in an old hiking boot, all were wearing trainers.

Various theories were proposed to explain the phenomenon: a serial killer with a foot fetish, a container full of migrants that had capsized and was now sitting on the ocean's floor, aliens, and more. But Laura Yazedjian, a forensic anthropologist who works as a human identification specialist for the British Columbia Coroners Service, undertook an investigation of the behaviour of human bodies in water. Most human cadavers will sink, due to a lack of oxygen in the lungs which otherwise function as a flotation device if filled with air. A body that floats and is exposed to air will decompose in a different way to those that sink; and those that do sink tend to go straight to the bottom. Sometimes, an underwater cadaver will eventually bloat, causing it to bob to the surface. But that doesn't always happen, and in a deep lake or ocean, it may never come back up. Not only does the cold inhibit





decay in deep waters, but the increased water pressure prevents any gases from expanding and causing bodies to float. Instead, other microbial processes take over and convert a sunken body's tissues to adipocere, a kind of waxy, soap-like tissue, which can persist for years or even centuries in a low-oxygen environment.

The severed feet found washed up on the shores of the Salish Sea were covered in adipocere, which might explain where the rest of the bodies were: they had sunk to the sea floor and remained there to decompose. Research in 2007 by forensic scientist Gail Anderson of Simon Fraser University for the Canadian Police Research Centre was conducted to learn how quickly a homicide victim would decompose in the ocean. Pigs' carcasses were used, since pigs are roughly comparable to humans in size, and are quite similar biologically. Anderson found that the pig's body, after sinking to the sea floor, was quickly eaten by shrimp, lobsters and crabs, starting with the anus region and the facial orifices. Underwater scavengers like crustaceans tend to work around bones and other tough areas of the body, preferring softer tissues. And since human ankles are composed mostly of soft tissue like ligaments, this would seem to explain why 'severed' feet keep appearing. If they really had been severed, cut marks would have been found on the bones. And feet clad in trainers made in the last decade or so would almost certainly float, because of gas-filled pockets and foams used in the soles with more air mixed in have made trainers lighter and more buoyant.

As for why the Salish Sea has seen so many of these feet, it seems this large body of inland water acts as a trap; westerly winds bring material in from the ocean where it remains. Why trainers? It is thought that many of the feet belonged to walkers who wore these sports shoes while hiking among the slippery rocks. Taken together, these factors, together with

cold deep waters and healthy scavenger populations, make the Salish the ideal foot magnet. DNA taken from each foot and matched against a database of more than 500 missing people in British Columbia and against Canada's National Missing Persons DNA Programme was able to link nine of the feet to seven missing people. For two, both feet were found; most had been missing for a year or more. The longest-missing person had disappeared in 1985; his foot in a hiking boot was found in 2011. In the most recent case, the foot of a young man who disappeared in 2016 washed up on an island in Puget Sound in 2019. The BC Coroners Service reports that none of the Canadian cases have so far been found to have been homicides. In some cases, it became clear that the person had died by accident or suicide (one woman had jumped from a bridge). Five of the feet still remain unidentified, but the solution as to why the feet appeared - hungry crustaceans - seems to fit the known facts. nationalgeographic.com, 15 Mar 2021.

MAD LOVE [FT240:22-23, 357:8-9, 388:6, FT394:11]



Gaëlle Engel, 43, claims to have been sexually attracted to inanimate objects since she was 12, but says she didn't know true passion until she fell in love with a German rollercoaster. The painter and poet has had three serious romantic human relationships, but found them all to be traumatic. "I will not philosophise on these relationships that ruined my life but it was only suffering, physical and moral," she said. "The men I dated had a lot of issues with alcohol and it was a very hard time for me." But a visit to the Holiday Park in southwestern Germany, 35km (22 miles) from Heidelberg (the venerable university town associated with such philosophical luminaries as Arendt, Gadamer, Habermas,



ABOVE: Who wouldn't fall for the charms of the Sky Scream rollercoaster? Gaëlle Engel says she dreams of "a carnal and fusional relationship" with the irresistably attractive fairground attraction.

Hegel, Jaspers and Weber) led to an encounter with the theme park's white-knuckle attraction, Sky Scream. "Since I met the Sky Scream rollercoaster, I understood what love was," says the French-born artist. "I spend every moment dreaming of a carnal and fusional relationship with it." Unlike her previous romantic partners, the rollercoaster, having no alcohol, drug or other issues, allows Ms Engel to feel empowered. "With Sky Scream, I feel completely confident."

Of course, the couple are unable to consummate their relationship, but Ms Engel says that "life made me understand that sex was not a priority in my relationship, especially following the difficulties and trials we encountered in not being able to see each other" due to the long-distance nature of their relationship. As an alternative to being in physical contact with her love, Ms Engel collects objects that represent Sky Scream to her, including a board of photos, an array of objects bought from the theme park and a pillow that has the rollercoaster's image printed on it, which she hugs daily. The artist finds her adoration for the theme park attraction frequently manifests in her work. "Sky Scream inspires me

a lot in everything I write and draw," she says. Having created models of the Sky Scream and other rollercoasters, she feels that the two have reproduced. "There are even some models that I made that are totally new inventions, so you can say that I have Sky Scream kids."

Ms Engel is not alone in her unusual choice of romantic partner. In 2017, self-identified 'objection sexual' Carol Santa Fe, claimed she had been in love with San Diego's historic Santa Fe train depot since the age of nine, taking its name for her own surname as if the two were a married couple. Similarly, Erika Eiffel and Eija-Riitta Eklöf-Berliner-Mauer say they have each 'married' their own objects of desire, the Eiffel Tower and the Berlin Wall respectively. Another self-described 'objection sexual' person (that is, someone attracted to objects rather than people) is Amanda Liberty, 34, who initially fell in love with a drum kit at the age of 14. She then lost her heart to New York City's Statue of Liberty, changing her surname by deed poll to Liberty. In 2020 she transferred her affections to a chandelier she calls Lumière, but said she is still on friendly terms with the Statue of Liberty. *New York Post*, Sun, 12 Mar 2021.



STRANGE DAYS

NECROLOG

This month, Hunt Emerson says goodbye to a Renaissance Man and longtime collaborator, and we remember the multifarious output of a fortean fiction writer



KEVIN JACKSON

My great friend and collaborator Kevin Jackson (aka Moose) passed away on 10 May 2021, suddenly and unexpectedly. I will miss him hugely, as will many others. Kevin was a big personality, endlessly interesting and entertaining, with a vast knowledge of all sorts of subjects – many of which he seems to have written books and articles about. I have described him as a Renaissance Man, only semi-jokingly. My bookshelves – print and digital – have more titles by him than any other writer except PG Wodehouse. Among others, he wrote a biography of film-maker Humphrey Jennings; an excellent maritime history series for Kindle (Seven Ships: Mayflower, Beagle, Bounty, etc.); monographs on *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Withnail and I*; a definitive audiobook biography of TE Lawrence; a fascinating account of a trip to Jerusalem with the Reverend Richard Coles to follow the Via Dolorosa; a charming little book about moose; and the beautiful elegiac narrative poem "Greta and the Labrador", illustrated by Jo Dalton.

Kevin will be known to Fortean Times readers mainly

through the series of over 200 *Phenomenonix* comics pages he wrote and I drew, under the heading "Lives of the Great Ocultists" (one of his "subjects"), which were published as a collection this year by Knockabout Ltd (see FT397:50-53; review FT400:62). Sadly, owing to the Covid-19 thing, we never had the chance to personally promote the book. That would have been a road trip to celebrate!

He also had an abiding interest in vampires – we did a few comics on them too. "DH Lawrence – Vampire Hunter" comes to mind, and pages about vampire movies. Kevin was also a film-maker, directing short, impressionistic movies, mostly about vampires. He even wrote a vampire rock opera called *Bite* – performed and recorded once. I believe that at one time he ran a Vampire Club in Cambridge, with students; it was a literary and critical, rather than practical, gathering.

He and I collaborated on a hilarious comics version of *Dante's Inferno* (Knockabout, 2012), which is pretty fortean. Kevin wrote extensively about Victorian artist and critic John Ruskin – Kevin may be one of the last people to have taken the Grand

Tour, following Ruskin's travels – and it is through Ruskin that he and I first came to work together, in 2005, on the comic books based on Ruskin's ideas that are collected under the title *Blake's Progress* (Knockabout, 2018). Ruskin may not be an obvious fortean, but the breadth and scope of his thinking bring him, I believe, within the broad church that we know as forteans.

Kevin was a founder member of the London Institute of Pata-physics, and held the Ordre de la Grande Gidouille from the Collège de Pata-physics in Paris. He was also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and a Companion of the Guild of St George.

Kevin has been the most satisfying and stimulating collaborator in comics I have had the good fortune to work with. He was known affectionately to his many (many!) friends as 'Moose'. The call of that noble ungulate will echo in loud celebration across the heavens in his memory.

Moose, I will miss your laugh, your wit and intelligence, your generosity, your constant interest in what other people thought and said. I will miss YOU!

Kevin Jackson, writer, broadcaster, film-maker; born London, 3 Jan 1955; died Linton, Cambridgeshire, 10 May 2021, aged 66.

Hunt Emerson

RON WEIGHELL

Before he could read, Ron Weighell found an old edition of Edgar Allan Poe stories illustrated by Harry Clarke, which he described as his "initiation into the pleasure of mystery and fear". For five years he served an apprenticeship as a carpenter and joiner in a shipyard in Fareham, Hampshire, where his father worked as cabinet-maker. In his 20s, he became involved with the work and ideas of The

Golden Dawn and artists such as Austin Osman Spare. He made amateur movies, wrote scripts for comedy sketches and funny songs that he performed with friends.

He was a founder member of WATSUP (The Wessex Association of Unexplained Phenomena). The group investigated UFO reports, hauntings and psychic events and organised monthly lectures on a range of esoteric subjects. He wrote articles and book reviews for the WATSUP journal, gave public talks and made the occasional appearance on local radio talk shows.

Ron's first published short story was in the long-running M R James Journal *Ghosts and Scholars* in 1984. His work continued to be published in *Ghosts and Scholars* and other journals such as AKLO and All Hallows. In 1986, Haunted Library Publications published his first short story collection, *An Empty House and Other Stories*.

Rosemary Pardoe, editor of *Ghosts and Scholars*, commented: "Ron was an early contributor to the journal and both I and the magazine's readers were greatly impressed by his Jamesian stories, which captured the tone and atmosphere so well, while also being wholly original. He also wrote a fascinating booklet, *Angles of Coincidence*, for my Haunted Library imprint, on the Rennes-le-Chateau mystery." The booklet was reviewed in FT49:75 (Winter 1987).

In 1992, the Northern Musgraves Sherlock Holmes Society invited Ron to produce a story for the 'Aspects of Holmes' weekend. "The Shadow of the Wolf", read out at the Society's annual dinner, was well received. His collection *The Irregular Casebook of Sherlock Holmes* was published in 2000 and reprinted in 2018. His second collection of short stories, entitled *The White Road*



and illustrated by Nick Maloret (a lifetime friend and collaborator), was published in 1997 with a revised edition in 2017. Two further collections followed: *Tarshishim* (2011) and *Summonings* (2014).

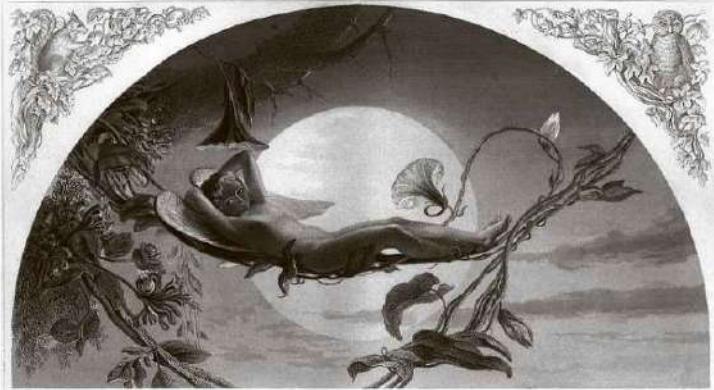
Ron's stories were included in over 50 anthologies and published in six volumes of his own work exclusively. "Carven of Onyx" and "China Rose" were chosen to appear in the 1992 and 1993 volumes of the US publication *The Year's Best Horror Stories*. "The Four Strengths of Shadows" and "The Chapel of Infernal Devotion" appeared in the annual British publication, *Best New Horror*, in 2015 and 2016.

Mark Valentine, editor of *Wormwood* and a biographer of Arthur Machen, said Ron "was a deeply knowledgeable scholar of the esoteric, and his studies richly inform his excellent supernatural stories, worthy of the masters he invoked such as Conan Doyle, Arthur Machen and M R James."

Ron retired from his carpenter and joiner job at the University of Portsmouth in 2008. At the time of his death he had almost completed a novel called *King Satyr*. Sarob Press are currently working with his widow Fran Weighell to prepare it for publication, hopefully later in 2021. For a detailed bibliography, see: https://en.everybodywiki.com/Ron_Weighell

Ron Weighell, writer in the supernatural, fantasy and horror genres, born Leeds, 22 Nov 1950; died Portsmouth, 24 Dec 2020, aged 70.

Fran Weighell



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

CHANGES

Parish and church records are dull documents with occasional flecks of gold. Long lists of forenames and surnames – the “noiseless tenor of their way” – enlivened by occasional asides about suicide, murder and passion (“she named x as the father”). There are also hints of folklore and forteana.

A nice example of this has just been sent to me from Scotland. A photograph shows that in the Ardnamurchan kirk session, c. 1789, provision was made for a “changeling” to be kept by his family. ‘Changeling’ traditionally refers, of course, to someone who had been changed by the fairies: “the meaning being that the fairies had slipped away the mother’s own child and substituted a little fiend in human form in its stead” (see FT373:30-37).

What were changelings really? Typically, they were kids with developmental problems. Many ‘changelings’ in Ireland, for instance, were boys who had lost or who had never had the ability to walk: poignantly, parents believed the fairies had taken their true child. The fact that money was given to the child’s family by the kirk authorities suggests that the child required special care. There is nothing surprising here. Changeling beliefs survived in isolated rural areas, particularly ones where English was not the principal language, well into the 19th century. My guess is that, c. 1800, perhaps

10 per cent of the inhabitants of Britain and Ireland believed that fairies could change children and were primed to interpret disability as something fey. Was this the case in Ardnamurchan? Well, Ardnamurchan was a difficult-to-reach Gaelic-speaking peninsula on the Atlantic coast, in an area where fairy belief mattered. I would be flabbergasted if changeling beliefs did not feature there, c. 1850, nevermind in the 1780s.

“THE FAIRIES HAD SLIPPED AWAY THE MOTHER’S OWN CHILD AND SUBSTITUTED A LITTLE FIEND”

There is a complication, though. Apparently, the word ‘changeling’ was used several times in the Ardnamurchan kirk sessions in the later 18th century. If that is the case, it looks as if a kirk officer systematically employed ‘changeling’ as a word for children with developmental issues. It would be interesting to see if other terms were used (like that cruel Victorian standby ‘imbecile’). Three possibilities. Was this a word that had been shorn of fairy meaning? ‘Changeling’ was occasionally used in English to mean a disabled child, without any supernatural overtones, prior to the 19th century. Did a kirk officer write ‘changeling’ to refer straightforwardly to the beliefs of parents, perhaps as a translation from a Gaelic term? Or was it a bit of both? Here was an unusual term for a disabled child. It would pass muster with any visitor from Edinburgh, while it also acknowledged the sovereignty of the people under the hill in local convictions. My money would be on the third.

Fifty-two shades of Grey: Paula's story

NIGEL WATSON speaks to the Bradford abductee whose story appeared in the British tabloid press

After the *Daily Star Sunday* splashed Paula E Green's story on their front page on 9 May with the headline "I've been abducted by aliens 52 times... says Paula from Yorkshire... You've had some bad luck, missus!" she was amazed at how one newspaper report has defined her. She was understandably annoyed that the headline was wrong, as she has knowingly experienced only a few abductions while fully aware. In the past she would have got very angry about it, but now she is slightly more relaxed about what people think.

For years Paula has been silent about her encounters, but she changed her mind "because I know there are others out there going through what I am going through. The more who speak up, it will help those who cannot come forward. Why should we hide in the shadows for fear of ridicule? It is happening and it is real."

Not surprisingly, her story caused a storm of interest.

Some say she is a fake or just plain loopy; others believe she really has had alien encounters. Regarding her social media critics, she says: "Well... I've been called some right shit this past few days. That goes straight over my head... Zero fucks given. But at least I've got more balls than most to speak out."

As a child, Paula did not have any concepts or words for these experiences, and was not even that aware of the subject of alien abductions. "I don't like the word 'alien' as it equals ET. I can't answer or speculate about what causes these experiences. It could be otherworldly... Is it random or intelligent? Why do they come here? I've never been happy about it."

"The experiences do pass through my family – my grandmother had them, but I never really listened to her when she spoke about them. My mother saw a spirit or two, but she kept such things to herself. I didn't tell a soul until 2012. I never read much about aliens, just seeing a picture of one made me physically sick."

Once she woke to see a 5ft (1.5m) tall

Grey at the end of her bed and two similar figures at her bedside. She snapped out of sleep suddenly, as if they had turned a switch. I asked her if this was probably due to sleep paralysis.

"Sleep paralysis is not the same. They don't shut your brain down. You are subdued and you cannot move. It takes all your energy to open your eyes, but you are fully aware. I've had sleep paralysis and its nothing like this."

THE BIRD AND THE PIG

Paula's first brush with the unknown came in 1974 when she was just four years old. It came in the form of a small black bird with an orange beak. Over a period of weeks, stretching into 1975, the bird came to her and spoke to her through some form of telepathic communication. It asked her questions like "Do you like school?" and "Do you like your family?" She remembers that it would sit beside her when she was outside her home, and that when her mother appeared it would fly to the rooftop of the house on the opposite side of the

street. Finally, it came to her and told her that "I won't be coming back. But I will return later in your life." At this, she burst out crying.

For Paula, unlike most children who have imaginary friends or pets, these types of experiences have haunted her for the rest of her life. She told me: "This was the start of it all. I thought it was imagination, but only a few years ago my late Mum said 'Remember that bird? You called it 'Inca'.' I had forgotten all about that. In my teens I never related it to my other alien-type experiences – it was a separate issue. Now I think it was an introduction."

At six years old, one dark evening in October 1977, Paula was playing in her front room with the family's Golden Labrador dog, Candy. Paula, for no particular reason, was teasing the dog and kept telling her "There is a pig at the window!" Candy suddenly ran away, and looking out the window Paula came face-to-face with two large almond eyes. She said: "I screamed and jumped backwards. I looked back again – it was clearly a small person, about my height. Was it a kid? It had a big bald, bulbous grey head. It had long arms and spindly fingers. It wore a black or dark blue skin-tight outfit that finished at the knees and wrists; it was like the Lycra outfits people wear today, but not then. I was so terrified... I had a flood of emotions."

Its body turned and bent forwards to run up the street but its head stayed straight upwards staring at her. All its proportions looked wrong. It almost glided in slow motion up the street and quickly went out of view. "Then everything came back to normal."

MISSING TIME

Paula's first UFO encounter occurred in October 1983, when she was 12 years old, as she was walking through Judy Woods, Bradford, with a 14-year-old friend. It was about 6.45pm when everything went silent.

She remembers: "I heard the lapping of water. We were on the edge of a lake or reservoir, about a foot away from it. Then





FAR LEFT: Paula E Green. **LEFT:** A picture by Paula showing one of the 'classic' Grey alien figures she has encountered during her experiences.

suddenly I saw about five to 10 feet [1.5 to 3m] in front what I can only describe as a boomerang with an extra arm. This is more accurate than saying it looked like a giant propeller, as the ends of the arms were more rounded. It was about 30ft [9m] high and wide, in an upright position, moving slowly clockwise at about one to five mph. The arms were nearly touching the water. As it was in front of me it looked huge and never-ending. There was a light at the end of each arm, one was blue, one green and the other I'm not sure about.

"At the centre of the object was an extremely black circle or hollow. From underneath, a fan of white light appeared. It seemed to be coming from something stationary behind the moving arms. Water underneath the light began to simmer and gave off a vapour or steam. Me and my friend were bathed in a pale blue light. Everything went slow motion – it was like a horror movie. I remember turning to my friend and saying, 'F***** run!' I knew we had to run. Blackness seemed to close in and it seemed like running in quicksand. Next minute, I was at the bottom of my street."

What really shocked her was that it was now 11.55pm, and there was a period of at least four hours that she could not account for.

"I don't remember going home. I can't get my head round it. Where the hell did I go? There was missing time but I really don't want to go through regression. I don't want to go back there and find out anything more terrible."

ABDUCTIONS

Since then she has had numerous encounters and paranormal experiences, mainly at or near her home in Great Horton, to the west of the City of Bradford, West Yorkshire. Regarding abductions she says: "On some occasions I'm not really abducted, which implies being taken without consent. I don't like the word 'abducted'. I black out and find myself somewhere

else. How can I say if I've been abducted if at times I'm not aware? Maybe I've gone somewhere. Where I go, I do not know, because I've not been fully conscious going from home to craft.

"About 10 years ago I found herself in a moulded, round room. Was I inside a UFO or a front room with props? Could it have been set-up by the military? A UFO craft is an easier thing to understand. I was sat in a chair, eyes focused on a screen. People were sitting near me. The totally glass screen was a bit bigger than an iPad. It showed scenery with a 3-D effect. It showed landscapes with rivers, birds and flowers in glowing vivid colours. It was a flow of pictures, but no people were in them. They made me feel very happy and elated. Then there was devastation, everything went to a normal colour and the river was now murky and the sky black and red. Now I was crying at the hideous and evil devastation rather than crying with joy at the previous images.

"Just beyond the screen was a black colour thing that had no shape, it was not a person or alien. It did not fit in, and I got the feeling I was not allowed to look at it. Then I woke up. It was not a dream – definitely reality."

Such experiences do not seem to follow any pattern. She explained that she has seen Greys, tall blondes and reptilians: "One of my contacts with a reptilian was in early 2021; I'm not sure about the date. I don't like putting a label on it. I went to bed at about 11.30, switching the downstairs lights off. All I remember, I'm stood in my bedroom with a coffee in my hand; then it is like a switch – I'm downstairs in the front room. It is dark and I'm in my pyjamas. I am normally scared of the dark and would normally switch the lights on. There was just the orange glow of the streetlight outside and it gave just about enough illumination. I don't know where my cup of coffee went! I had the urge to get the key and open the front door. Outside, at the top of the road, was a group of lads in their teens or twenties. Four were in a group and one

near them was leaning against a wall. I kept gazing around from the doorway, then one of the lads shouted "lights gone out" or "lights going out." The lights are still on but the lad is adamant, just as I'm thinking "No, they haven't," the power goes and the streetlights go out.

"I then see a figure between my doorway and the tree next door. It is very tall, 7ft [2m] I would say and broad, about 3ft [0.9m] wide. I could not see much detail, and considering it was so close I was not phased by it. It just did not register with me. I wonder why I had no urge to go? I'm still baffled.

"Thinking back on it, the 'lads' were probably not human either. The shout seemed to be directed at me. I felt nothing, yet I'm normally scared of the dark. As the door was still gaping open I went to lock it when something forcefully grabbed me by the top of my left arm and led me four paces onto the living room rug. I was facing the wall and seeing a circular, pale blue light coming down from above. It was big enough for three people to fit in the beam. Every emotion was numb. I look up at the wall. I see in the light a crocodile face, with yellowing teeth; beyond its mouth, it is too dark to see anything else. Then, as it leans down, there are two little black eyes that are hard to look at.

"Its nose came within inches of my nose. Its skin was leathery and lumpy, giving the impression of scales. The skin had an iridescent purple hue, then a brownish colour or grey; it changed when I moved my head just a few millimetres. Then I woke in my bed in the morning. That was it. I describe it as a crocodile-like thing with teeth and fangs, but others think it was what is called a reptilian."

A LIFETIME OF EXPERIENCES

"Would anyone want a gift like this? We have it. PTSD caused by aliens – it is a burden. It drains me. It is not something you'd want to keep. Love to give it away. It is not a gift."

"It affects millions of people throughout the world. It depends on the psychological make-up of people. Just in the UK there could be thousands. Many cannot speak up because of religion, work and fear of ridicule. They want to cry out but they can't."

I found Paula to be utterly convincing in her detailed recollections of these experiences, and am certain that she is neither a liar nor a hoaxter.

The question of what is causing the experiences is an altogether trickier issue: we are literally in a grey area (pun intended) where our concepts of reality and perception are severely challenged.

NOTE The original reports gave Paula the pseudonym 'Paula Smith'.

TRASHED O' MULLOS

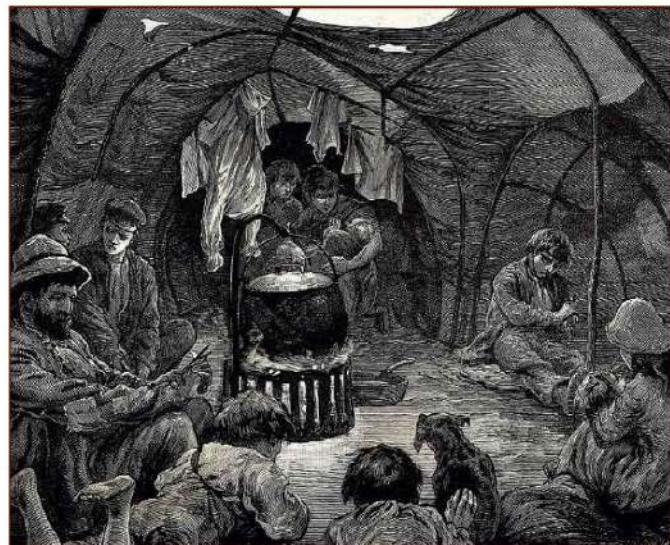
GHOST STORIES OF THE GYPSIES

In the quiet places of the English countryside, a legacy of strange experiences has been passed down within the travelling community. **JEREMY HARTE** brings to light the stories told by a fiercely independent people, and finds that traditions among the Romany have much to tell us about the supernatural itself.

Tutte jins, said Tommy Boswell to a gentleman friend, *sar Romanichals si 'jaw trashed o' mullos*: which in the language of the house-dwellers, means "You know that all Gypsies are truly terrified of ghosts". Old Robert Smith could tell you about that. Hadn't he got on the donkey's back one night, when his wife was taken ill, and ridden four miles to see the doctor? Then returning, and trying to take a short cut, he found himself at a crossroads, where the donkey began to kick and jump, all in a dripping sweat. And turning round he saw a *boro kovel av avi o bor*, a great something come out the hedge, more like a pig than anything else, with its eyes like balls of fire, and jumping easily out of the way of his stick. At last the thing put its tail in its mouth, turned round three times and left, and Robert got back to find his wife on the mend. And as soon as she was well, they packed up tent and rods and all, said goodbye to that dreadful place, and never went there again.¹

That's typical for a Gypsy ghost story.² Away in a lonely spot, something eerie has crossed your path, bizarre and unexplained; even at the end of the story, it is neither pacified nor laid, but simply left behind, for the Gypsy solution to life's problems was always to put the horse in the shafts and move on. So it was in 1912 when Tommy Smith told his story, so it had been for generations before, and so it still is, for these stories are still popular today. Maybe they are not being told to strangers: Alan Murdie, who must know more about ghosts than any man alive, didn't have many of these tales to hand when he wrote about Gypsies and the supernatural recently in these pages (see FT393:18-21). This ghostlore is an isolated tradition, but it is passionately held. You do not have to fly to the ends of the Earth to find people with a different culture, language and supernatural lore. It is all here in England, on the far side of the hedge, behind that fence on the fringe of town.

That's true today, even though the language is just a ghost of its former self. How much more so it must have been when Old Romani



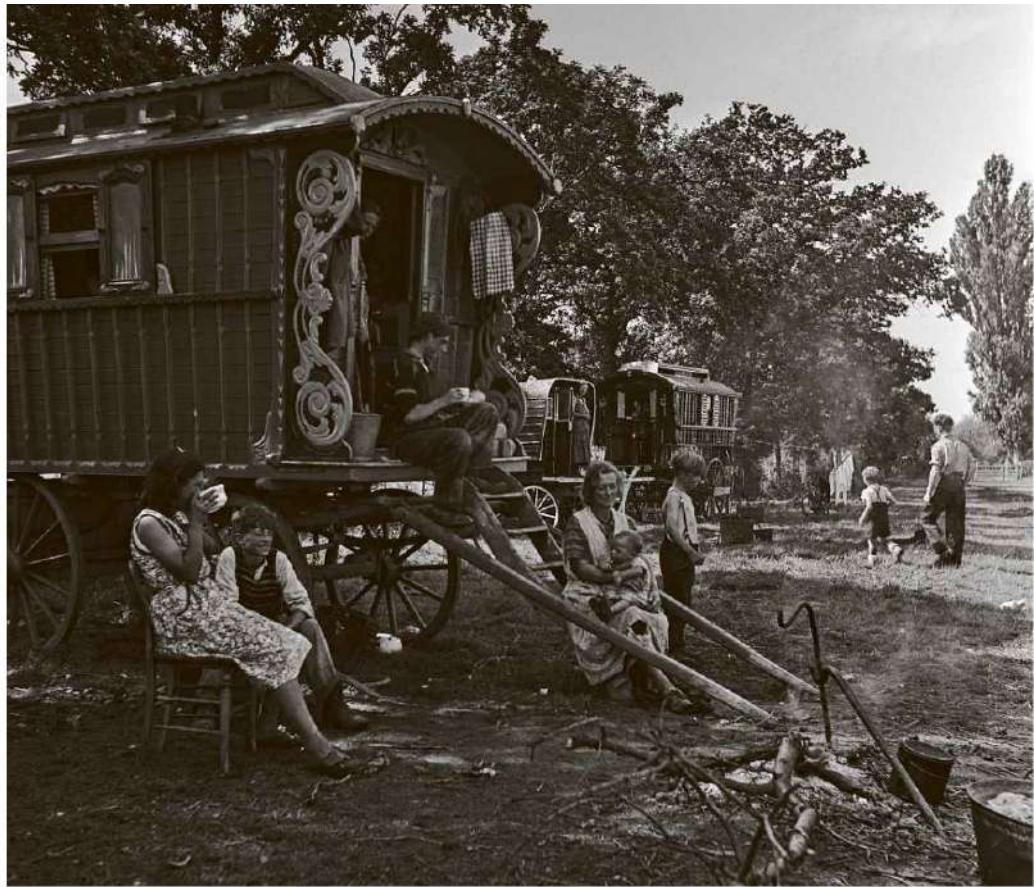
AWAY IN A LONELY SPOT, SOMETHING EERIE HAS CROSSED YOUR PATH, BIZARRE AND UNEXPLAINED

was the home speech of the community, and English was only used for communicating with the gorgers – the settled people, those threatening strangers outside the warm circle of Gypsy firelight. Romani is a practical lan-

ABOVE: The Gregory family in their bender tent at Mitcham in 1879. **RIGHT:** A detail from 'Gypsy Camp by Moonlight, near Knutsford, Cheshire' by Edward Priestley in Warrington Museum.

guage, worked and reworked on the long road that led from the plains of northern India to the furthest reaches of Europe; it contains ideas that do not quite match up with the usual way of thinking in English. *Mullo*, for instance (it rhymes with 'fuller'), doesn't quite mean 'ghost', but has a primary sense of 'dead body'. Like the people of the Balkans who gave Romani so much of its vocabulary, Gypsies didn't think of a revenant as a wispy thing, but as a real, heavy body rising from the grave: so much so that when early Christian converts wanted to talk about the spirit, they





ABOVE: A gypsy encampment at Brook Farm in Wingham, Kent, during the plum-picking season, September 1942.

had to invent a new word for it, *bavolengro*, 'him of the wind'. The other sort of ghost was physical and frightening, though it might not necessarily come in human form.

BOUNDARY ISSUES

"I knows a lot about *mullos*," said a little Boswell. "There's different sorts – milk-white 'uns and coal-black 'uns. When we're abed at nights, they come screaming round our wagon and flapping at the windows.... When mammy's going out with her basket of a morn-ing, and daddy's gone somewhere to see about a hoss, I daren't go far into the big wood agen our stopping-place, 'cos of the black pig what lives there. Daddy has seen it, and nobody can't kill it, for you can bang a stick right through it without hurting it. Mammy allus says 'Don't you never go into that wood, else the black pig'll get you.'"³ A convenient bogie, if he kept the young ones from straying: but it wasn't just children who saw dark things. "In about 1927 in a little lane near Gainsborough

"GORDON BOSWELL AVERS THAT HE SAW THE DEVIL IN THE SHAPE OF A LARGE BLACK DOG"

Gordon Boswell, for whose truthfulness I have the highest regard, avers that he saw the Devil in the shape of a large black dog.⁴ Supernatural animals were so common you couldn't always be certain you were looking at a live one. One of the Smiths was stopping in a field in Suffolk and went out after sunset to see to his donkey. Instead of coming up to him and nuzzling for a tit-bit, the animal stood aloof.

Though clearly standing still as a stone, as the owner walked towards him he receded further and further away, until finally he vanished. And the next morning the real donkey was found in the village pound, where he had been all the time.⁵

You had to be careful when going out at night. Old Tom Lee was on the way to Brough Hill Fair with a couple of Romany pals, bringing horses to the fair, and he went to check them last thing before it got dark. The other men called him back, but he wanted to get everything done right. They called him again, and this time there was something in their voices that didn't make him want to linger. When he got back, they were asking, Didn't you see it? All the time he'd been tending to the *grais*, there was a black shadow on his back, climbing all over him, like an animal.⁶ That was in the Fifties. Forty years later, at another gathering – Yarm Fair, this time – the talk was of another stopping-place best avoided. "There was a little man sitting at



LEFT: Horses seem to recognise the presence of the supernatural before humans do. Job Nixon (1891-1938), *Gypsy Encampment*. BELOW: A wagon travels through the Devil's Punch Bowl near Hindhead, where Hilda Brazil's grandfather had a strange experience with his horses.

won't stay up the lane; they never will, and often they comes down with a gallop.”¹⁰

Horses always knew Reuben Draper pointed out a holly tree at Chesham as a place where you should never stay. Why not? Because a family tried it, and tied their horse to the tree to keep him safe, but he pranced about so much they thought he was going down with the staggers. As soon as they untied him, he was fine. Another family that hadn't heard the story did the same, but the horse was so miserable, pulling and whinnying, that they soon moved on. And after that, no one would approach the tree, they knew it had a *mullo*. Ah, said Britannia Smith, but there's a way to tell if a place is safe. “The owl knows when ghosts is about, for it never goes where they are; so my people always stop where we hear the owl cry, don't we, brother?”¹¹

“My mother's father was stopping one night, back in the old days,” Hilda Brazil of the Surrey Gypsy Forum tells me, “and last thing he did, he tied the horse to a rail. Well, the horse was kicking and sweating – he went back to him, he tried to soothe him, but he couldn't do nothing, and in the morning that horse was all white with the sweat on him. When it was day there comes a policeman to move them on, and he says, I'm surprised to see you've pulled on here. Surprised? – what for? Don't you know, says the *gawver*, this is the place where the sailor was killed, over there, just where that rail is.” They'd stopped in the Devil's Punch Bowl, where the famous murder took place.

Another cautionary tale came from Jim Penfold of Battersea, who was a big man in the days of the Gypsy Council; it was passed down to him by his grandmother. Her parents had stopped at Ruddington, a day's journey from

the front of the wagon. My dad chased him but he couldn't catch him so he turned round and went back to the waggons. When he got there the little man was sitting back where he had been before. So he chased him again, but couldn't catch him... The next day we had to move on.”⁷

The boundary between this world and the other was easily transgressed, but then Gypsy life was already open to things from outside. Romany people lived an outdoor life, and for most of the 19th century there was no sleeping accommodation apart from bender tents. These were made out of a frame of hazel rods with blankets pinned over them, so that nothing more than a thickness of cloth separated you from whatever was in the night. This bred a different attitude to the supernatural from that of house-dwellers, locked away from the darkness by their doors and walls. The Lockes knew of a family who stopped down a lane near the Black Mountains in the 1870s, “and about midnight Dosia saw something get over the gate, like an old woman; and it come and stood close by her tent, looking down upon her as she was lying abed.” She shouted at it in Romani, *Tutte wafodi puri grasni, ka so beshes tutte adot?* – “You filthy old mare, why are you standing there?” – and it moved over to the men's tent, saying something like “I'll take the two” with a groaning sound and a gale of wind. “And that very instance Old Gilderyo and his son was dragged right out of the place behind. They couldn't help themselves, they said; and the tent was blown clean up.” They lay on the ground till morning and then packed up and moved on. “And we never went back to that place, nor we never stopped there neither.”⁸

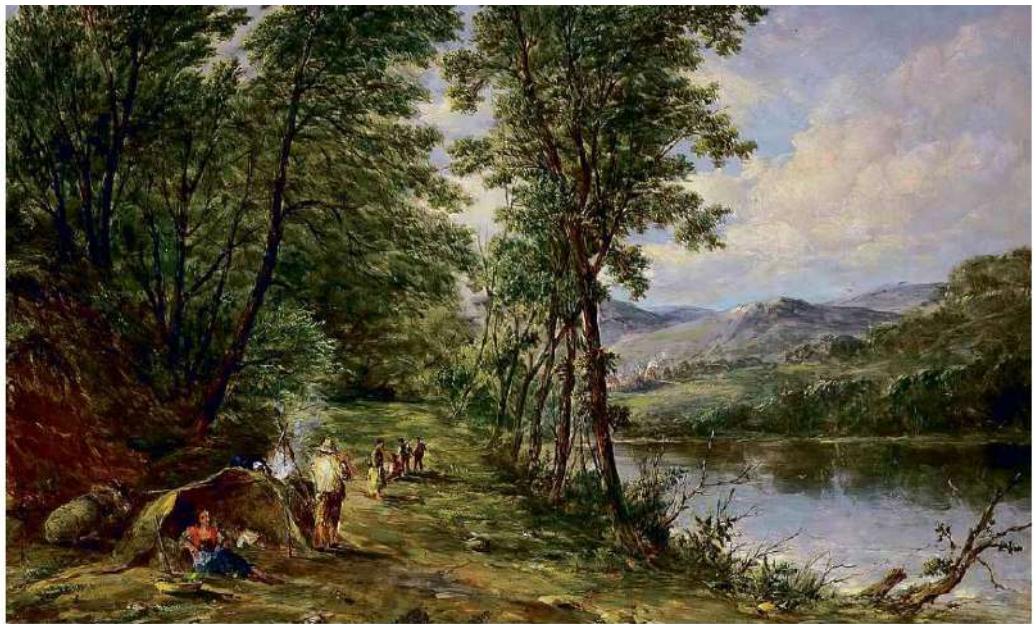
As the 19th century wore on, tents gave way to living-waggons (the ‘Gypsy caravan’ of children's books) but these were still far more permeable to the outside world than houses. Every outside noise is audible in a wagon, and you fall asleep to the sound of the rain on the roof. Gypsies felt, perhaps with reason, that a life spent close to wild nature was the

best preparation for observing the supernatural. As one of the Welsh Woods said to a visitor: “You're a gorjer. Things like that won't appear to you, because you've got no faith in them.”⁹

HORSE SENSE

Gypsies defied the threat of the supernatural, not by locking and barring it out, but by watching out for its presence, paying close observation to what was going on around them. Significantly, even though there are plenty of charms for good luck, there is no equivalent in Romany tradition to the hagstones and witch balls and lucky horseshoes with which gorjers protected their homes, even when these things would have been easily portable; they belonged to a different mindset. Instead a family would carefully study the behaviour of other living creatures, especially the horses. A group of Smiths were stopping at Quakers Lane outside Kendal, where there were *mullos dikkid 'drey rati*, hauntings seen at night. How did they know? “Look at that there horse; he





ABOVE: Alfred Vickers, Sr. (1786-1868), *A Gypsy Encampment in the Isle of Wight*. Tents would eventually give way to waggons and, later, trailers.

Nottingham Fair, and it looked a *kushti poov*, a decent place, but as soon as they gone to bed the horses began to neigh and stamp, and the dogs howled. As they got out to quieten the animals, the wagon started to rock back and forth, like something shaken in a high wind. But there was no wind. The wife's hawking-basket was whisked a hundred yards across the field and everything in it was scattered, then the heavy kettle-iron blew into the air as if it were a straw *ta wustered aglal o vardo sa churi*, and was thrown against the wagon like a knife. They didn't dare set a foot nearer but spent the night under the hedge, too *trashed* to move, until they fell asleep from sheer weariness and fright. And when the Sun rose and the singing of the birds woke them, they looked out, afraid of what they'd see, but nothing was wrong. The horses were still tied to the catch on the back of the wagon, the dogs asleep under the wheels, the kettle-iron where they'd left it in the ashes of last night's fire, and there wasn't a scratch on the *vardo*. They looked at each other in amazement and pulled immediately to get away from the place.

Well, the fair was a good one and it took their minds right off what had happened, till at the end they were visited by a missioner, one of those preachers that goes round looking after the souls of the Romany. And they told him what had happened, the wagon shaking and the basket flying through the air and everything. "Tell me," says the *rashai*, "tell me, what did you have in the basket?" "Nothing much," says Great-Grandmother, "just some lengths of *kushti* mohair lace that I was going

TO SETTLED PEOPLE A GYPSY IS JUST ONE MORE CHARACTER IN THE COSTUME PARADE OF HISTORY

to hawk at the fair." "And where was this field?" They told him just where, and he looks very serious and says "That's the place where the girl was murdered." "What girl?" "The one that got strangled with a length of mohair lace."¹²

It didn't always have to be grim. Fiddling Tiger Shaw, who travelled in the Fenland, knew a Gypsy couple who were out after fodder for the horse. Luckily, they'd found a lonely haystack and were about to pull out the hay when "they looked up and saw on the top of the stack a wizened old man wearing a three-cornered hat, a cut-away coat with silver buttons, knee-breeches, silk stockings, buckled shoes, and by his side hung a curious sword." Well, there's no harm in talking, so the wife asked the old thing if it didn't mind them taking some hay, just a handful, to keep the poor horse strong. And it nodded, so off they went with a big armful each, and a trail of loose wisps dropped behind them all the way to the

wagon. It was easy to see where they'd been and in the morning the squire himself came to wake them up, asking what they thought they'd been at in his haystack. And they said they'd had permission, and described what they'd seen. "At this the squire turned deathly pale, and laid hold of a fence to steady himself. 'Why, you've seen my old grandfather who has been dead years and years, and if he gave you leave, you can get as much of that hay as you please.' And you may be sure they did."¹³

GORJER GHOSTS

There's a pattern emerging here. Gypsies find themselves by accident in a strange place, where they are alarmed by a *mullo*: sometimes this is just a senseless something, but sometimes it is explained by a story about some stranger who died – and that story will itself be told by a stranger, a gorjer. As for the threatening dead, they too are always gorjers: a sailor, a village girl or, in the explanation which followed the Lockes' story, a drunken gentleman. Gypsies do not tell about places haunted by other Gypsies.

And yet there is no shortage of such accounts from the other side of the racial divide. Alan Murdie effortlessly quotes a dozen locations from which gorjers report Gypsy apparitions. True, these are a small minority in ghostlore; they have to share their hour in the moonlight with phantom monks, Cavaliers, smugglers, Vikings, ladies in white and other easily recognisable figures, because to settled people a Gypsy is just one more character in the costume parade of history. But this sort of



ABOVE: A postcard of a gypsy waggon in Woking. BELOW: Members of the Boswell family at the Epsom Derby for the annual horse race on Epsom Downs, 1949.

imaginative assimilation is not an option to Romanies, for whom the host community will always be an inescapable Other, pressing at the edge of consciousness by sheer force of its majority. Gypsies outnumber Gypsies, as the dead outnumber the living. It is their ghosts, and not those of the community, which appear unannounced to wreck stopping-places and move people on; but then, was that very different from what they did while alive?

True, there are Gypsy traditions about the return of dead Gypsies, but they are very different in character, though they may also be covered by that versatile word *mullo*. In the 1910s Yobel Gray joined in a conversation on spectral things by saying "Why, yes, of course, mother, there's *mullos*. Don't you remember after Dolferus died, his voice used to speak in the tent to Delaia? She says it really was his voice as nat'r'l as life, and it made her shiver to hear it. One day she went to a parson for advice. He told her the next time it spoke, to say: 'I promise you nothing. Begone!' Well, sure enough, the voice came again, and she remembered to say what the parson had told her, and she never heard the voice no more."¹⁴

Another story was told 30 years later, when waggon had replaced tents, by Caroline Price from South Wales. She was sitting with her husband when "we both heard the sound of heavy footsteps coming towards the waggon from outside. I clutched my *rom* and whispered to him not to say a word. Up the waggon stairs came the footsteps and in through the door, which wasn't open. We could not see anybody, but we could hear a sound as if

someone heavy, like a man, sat down on that little fixed seat just behind the door. The seat creaked under the weight. We sat still for what seemed a very long while, and then whoever it was went out, down the steps, and away again."¹⁵ The Gypsy who owned the *vardo* before them had been a big tall fellow; they lost no time in selling off a waggon that was obviously still dear to him.

And to bring things up to date, here is another story from Hilda Brazil. "When trailers were starting to come in my mother bought one new. It was a Bluebird and she got it ever so cheap. It wasn't very big, one of those ones where you pull the bunk bed down. And she was sitting on that bed, next to the kitchen part, and she heard the most awful crash, it was like cups and saucers falling and break-



DON PRICE / FOX PHOTOS / GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE: The burning of Sarah Bunce's wagon at Reading in 1924.

ing. It wasn't just her, there was other people who heard it, always the same crash. Well, they didn't like that and they sold the trailer on. And it was only then, afterwards, that the people who sold it to them came up and said – We didn't want to tell you – not while you was living there – but the old lady who had it before, she died sudden, of a heart attack. She was just coming through from the kitchen with the tea-things. Dropped them, she did, dropped the tray all over the floor."

MOVING ON

There's a pattern emerging here, too. Gorjer ghosts are seen, but Gypsy ghosts are heard. The ghosts of strangers are threatening, come from the past, and can only be understood by asking other outsiders for an explanation, whereas ghosts from within the community are harmless, if alarming; they come from the generation that is only just gone, and other Gypsies know well who they were. You escape them, not by moving away from a place, but by selling on the haunted property, preferably at a profit. After all, wagons and trailers have never been permanent possessions; as luck came and went, you traded your vehicle up or down depending on what you could get for it. That gave you a flexibility which was impossible for people who had gone into brick.

In the 1990s a family in York thought they would sell off their trailer and move into a house. That lasted until the night they were sitting round the telly and a blast of wind came out of nowhere, shaking all the pots

EVERYTHING WAS DONE TO PUT DISTANCE BETWEEN THE DEAD PERSON AND THE LIVING

down in the kitchen. The next day Father was talking to the gorjer neighbour, and he told him about the previous occupants, a group of young people who'd left when one of them died in the house. "The next day we moved out of the house and back into a trailer. We've never been in another house since."¹⁶ This has the tropes of older stories about threatening *mullos*, but with all the complications added by an address and a front door: moving away is not so easy when you have to sell a house to do it.

Moving on might have been the quickest answer to life's problems, but it came into its own at the time of death. Then everything was done to put distance between the dead person and the living, a principle which underlay many traditions, including the burning of the wagon. As the most public part of the funeral, this attracted spectators from beyond even the most extended family circle, including jour-

nalists, who left convinced that every Gypsy life ended with a *vardo* going up in flames. In fact, the ceremony was usually reserved for elderly and respected people, but it formed the last step in a sequence of much more common acts: breaking up the household china, burning clothes, and in the older and less-regulated days, shooting dogs and horses.¹⁷ Everything with a personal, organic link to the dead person was destroyed.

Ceremonies invite explanations, and here the most obvious one was that these things were done to prevent the return of the dead. If the wagon or trailer of the deceased was burnt, broken up, or sold on to those who knew no better, then there was no risk of heavy footsteps or crashing plates disturbing its new occupants. This makes a kind of sense, but rituals aren't always so logical. Gypsies will also put away photographs of a family member who has died, though the dead do not return to photo frames. The important thing is to sever connections between those that are gone and those who are living. You don't avoid speaking the name of the dead, as was the custom for close relatives, because you fear their *mullo* popping up out of the hedge: you do it because that would bring them back to memory, and kindle old sorrows.

It is quite compatible to feel the keenest grief for a lost companion, and yet to be full of dread at the death which has overtaken them. Awareness of contamination by death is very strong among Gypsies; with a people for whom memory counts for more than written rules



ABOVE: Scenes from the 2019 Surrey Romany Day: a family around the bow-top, and Bluey Bagley by the fire.

and arrangements, these things are not easy to shrug off or strike a line through. I was looking at some black horses, beautifully turned out, and the owner came up and started talking about them. Yes, they were a fine pair, but he'd made the mistake of his life lending them out to an undertaker who wanted one of those old-fashioned horse-drawn funerals. Now nobody would buy them. They were *mullerdei grais*.

ADJACENT FOLKLORES

The Gypsy world abides by its own rules. "When you gather round the fire with the members of Tom and Caroline Gray's family," wrote their scholarly amanuensis in 1922, "on a dreary afternoon or long dark evening in winter, the chances are that before very long you will find yourself in a world where the devil and the fairies, the cunning man and the witch, take a prominent part in human affairs; a world of enchantments and strange apparitions, and portents that always come true; a world in which the dead return to trouble the living, and men must be circumspect if they would avoid contamination."¹⁸ That was true then, and much of it is still true today. But it was also true that Gus Gray was a storyteller, master of his craft, and if he was alive now he'd be another Stanley Roberts or Richard O'Neill, with all enquiries booked through his agent. The supernatural could be a source of entertainment as well as terror.

Phantom black dogs, invisible footsteps, restless horses, and the voice of a newly dead relative: these are the common stuff of ghostlore, and Gypsies cannot lay any particular claim to them, although when stories are told by the community these motifs are selected and recombined to reflect a particularly Gypsy sensibility. But the presence of this parallel supernatural, different to but co-existing with the culture of the gorjers, raises difficult questions about the relationship between ghostly

legend and paranormal reality.

It's often claimed that popular traditions contain some kernel of genuine anomalous experience, clothed by the percipients with added details from tradition. So the researcher's job is to strip away the stage effects of phantom coaches, corpse candles, hooded monks and so on and get back to the primary paranormal stimulus which prompted them. That might be workable: but it's certainly true that the more limited your knowledge of different traditions, the more likely you are to mistake the norms of your own culture for objective universal facts.

Settled people, for instance, take it for granted that a ghost sighting will feature figures from the historical past who are seen at places where significant events happened. There has been much paranormal theorising – place-memory, stone tapes, Lethbridge's ghouls and so on – to provide a scintilla sort of explanation for this phenomenon. But there is no phenomenon to explain, because place-ghosts are purely a convention of settled culture. Gorjers see them because they expect to see them. Gypsies don't expect, and don't see.

As the stories have shown, stopping-places can be haunted by anything from black shadows to malicious winds, but they never feature a visual re-enactment of a past event. As for haunted houses, what price place-memory when your home is on wheels? It's one thing to imagine the limping tread of Henry VIII somehow burning itself into the stonework of Hampton Court. It's quite another to suppose that uncle's footsteps will physically write themselves into the canvas of a bowtop wagon and trundle along with it all the way to Appleby and back.

For 500 years, English Gypsy culture has remained distinct from that of the host community, and we can understand more about ghosts when we place the two folklores side by

side than could ever be found by treating them separately.

NOTES

- ¹ William Dutt, *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 2nd ser 6, 1912-13, pp68-9.
- ² 'Gypsies', please, not 'Traveller' (which covers many different groups, including the Irish) or 'Roma' (which is used for Eastern European members of the great Romany diaspora).
- ³ George Hall, *The Gypsy's Parson*, 1915, pp66-7.
- ⁴ Richard Wade, *JGLS* 3rd ser 46, 1967, p124
- ⁵ Charles Leland et al, *English-Gypsy Songs*, 1875, pp135-6.
- ⁶ Jane Stewart-Liberty, *JGLS* 3rd ser 32, 1953, pp149-50.
- ⁷ Sarah Buckler, *Fire in the Dark*, 2007, p66.
- ⁸ Francis Groome, *In Gypsy Tents*, 1880, pp174-6.
- ⁹ John Sampson, *The Dialect of the Gypsies of Wales*, 1926, s.v. *siker*.
- ¹⁰ Stanley Atkinson, *JGLS* 2nd ser 3, 1909-10, pp232-3.
- ¹¹ Stewart-Liberty, *JGLS* 1953, pp146-7.
- ¹² Jim's records are in the Surrey Gypsy Archive, contact Surrey History Centre.
- ¹³ Hall, 1915, pp147-8.
- ¹⁴ Hall, 1915, p109.
- ¹⁵ Doris Stephens, *JGLS* 3rd ser 24, 1945, p62.
- ¹⁶ Buckler, 2007, p67.
- ¹⁷ Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald, *Gypsies of Britain*, 1944, pp72-108.
- ¹⁸ Thomas Thompson, *JGLS* 3rd ser 1, 1922, p128. See also GD Jones, *Gypsy Campfire Stories* (Privately published, 2019, ISBN 9798668541942). It's a brilliant collection of experiences as they are told within the community.

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TROMPE LE MONDE

THE RETURN OF ERWIN SAUNDERS

After a gap of almost two years, intrepid pixie-hunter Erwin Saunders has resumed his investigations. With his YouTube views ascending into the millions, global Erwinmania seems imminent: even the British tabloids have begun to speculate about the truth behind these eccentric short films. **BOB FISCHER** rounds up the latest developments, and even secures an interview (of sorts) with the elusive Erwin himself...



ABOVE: Erwin Saunders, back in the saddle and in search of pixies on Dartmoor, 2021.

Morsu pixies, tremble in your ziggurats. Erwin Saunders is back. The bearded “etheriologist” became the subject of his first FT feature back in August 2020 (see FT395:46-48) after Ghost Box Records founder Jim Jupp alerted me to the presence of 17 short YouTube videos uploaded between September 2017 and July 2019. Shot in idyllic British woodland, they appear to depict the amiably bumbling Erwin documenting the behaviour of a mischievous species of native fairy-being. The pixies themselves are seen onscreen and are a convincing presence, and Erwin’s adventures

HE CLAIMED HE'D BEEN STRUCK BY A POISONED PIXIE ARROW

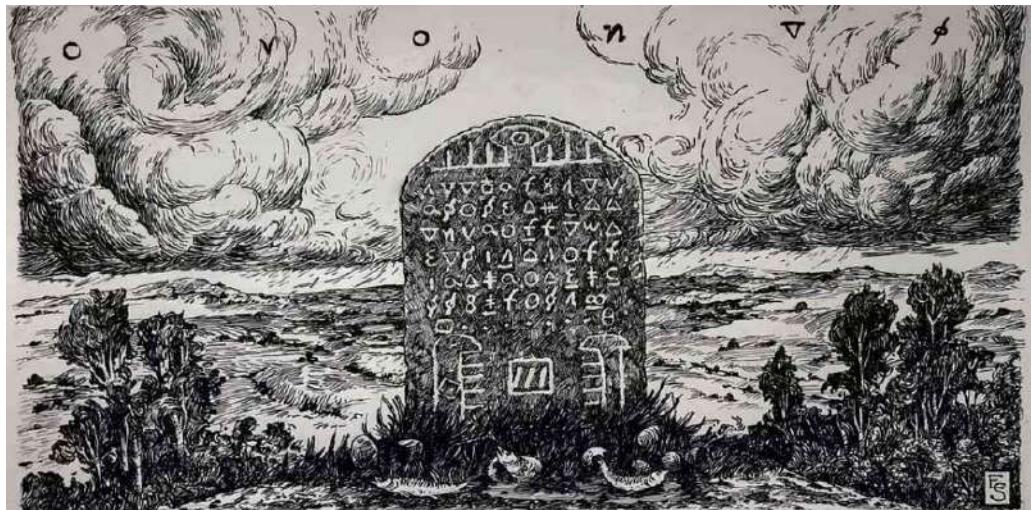
are charming and immersive: he leaves Flying Saucer sweets as bait (“They go mad for the sherbet”) and finds tiny, elaborate walkways strung between the trees, all the while engaged in a good-natured war of words with

his unseen accomplice, a “young film-maker” called Tom.

At that stage, the films seemed a little under-appreciated. Erwin’s YouTube subscribers numbered in the low thousands, and – by the time of the 17th film – the man himself appeared dejected, distractedly cutting off clumps of his beard and claiming to have been struck by a poisoned pixie arrow with hallucinogenic properties. From July 2019 to February 2021, no further uploads were made, but speculation began to grow as to the nature of Erwin’s true identity.

WHO IS ERWIN SAUNDERS?

“I was able to link one particular video on the Erwin Saunders channel, ‘Searching



ABOVE: The mysterious illustration from Erwin's 5 February video – the cipher on the stone has since been cracked. BELOW: Morsu pixies at play.

for Wiltons Pixies' to a video on the bustykelp YouTube channel, 'Pixie', uploaded 11 years ago," wrote FT reader Adam Waldock (FT397:69). "This led me to the Bust Kelp animation studio, the director of which is Paul Smith. On his LinkedIn profile, there is a clear resemblance with the Erwin Saunders character."

Completely different names, meanwhile, were suggested to me in e-mails from other FT readers, amid – I'm happy to say – testaments on my Haunted Generation website from readers convinced that Erwin and the Morsu pixies were entirely real. This all, however, seemed entirely academic. The Erwin Saunders YouTube channel remained resolutely untouched, despite a giddy spiral of interest: by February 2021, over 100,000 subscribers had pledged their allegiance. And then, on 5 February, there was an intriguingly cryptic development. A new video was uploaded (FT404:66-67): a static illustration of a headstone/marker stone covered in mystical symbols, accompanied by the sound of a barely audible human voice drowned out by mournful bagpipes.

This, amazingly, prompted the attention of the British tabloids. "Pixie hunter Erwin Saunders who 'filmed Britain's wilderness folk' for 25 years returns" was the headline posted on the *Daily Star* website on 6 March, above a story written by reporter Michael Moran. "The bearded eccentric sparked a cult after he uploaded a series of YouTube videos chronicling his discovery of 'wilderness folk' hiding in the hedgerows and undergrowth of a remote English wood," continued the feature. "Then, as strangely as he appeared on the



scene, Erwin vanished. He hasn't been heard of for over a year. But a spooky two-minute video uploaded to his YouTube channel seems to promise a return. Some internet detectives theorise that the real creative force behind Erwin's paranormal adventures is CGI wizard Paul Smith – which would certainly go some way towards explaining the photorealistic 10-inch tall pixies scampering around in the videos."

DECODING THE STONE

Shortly afterwards, I was contacted by FT reader Roger J Morgan, who had cracked Erwin's cryptic marker stone message. The voice beneath the bagpipes was reading Robert Burns's 1790 poem *Lament Of Mary, Queen Of Scots, On The Approach Of Spring*, and the main inscription on the stone was written

in a 16th century cipher used by Mary and her co-conspirators to plot the assassination of Queen Elizabeth I. It decodes as:

COOKERY, COVENANTS,
DISSOLVE
ARROWS, TONICS, CARRIES
BEAST, BUNNY, BRANCH

Entering each of these lines into What3Words, the app that assigns a unique three-word combination to every 3m² area of the Earth, reveals three contrasting locations. "Cookery, Covenants, Dissolve" takes us to the Many Thanks gift shop in Mauchline, Scotland; "Arrows, Tonics, Carries" to Hundred Thousand Creek on the west coast of Canada; and "Beast, Bunny, Branch" to a marina in Plymouth where a cluster of

submarines are docked.

The hidden message here? "Many Thanks, Hundred Thousand, Subs". Touchingly, the cryptic missive is little more than Erwin expressing gratitude to the 100,000 subscribers on his YouTube channel. Meanwhile, the characters in the sky above the stone translate as "AVALON"; the underlined characters on the stone become "IRCTUBH" and – beneath the main message on the stone – there are characters that decode as "F-----G".

Arranging the scrambled underlined characters into these gaps gives us "FITCHBURG", and putting "AVALON FITCHBURG" into What3Words brings us to the Avalon Assisted Living Community in Fitchburg, Wisconsin. The drawings of fish on Erwin's stone are presumably a reference to



LEFT: A younger-looking Erwin and Tom from "about 10 years ago". ABOVE AND BELOW: Tom and Erwin on their 2021 expedition to Dartmoor.

its location on Fish Hatchery Road; and close inspection of this building on Google Maps reveals the mysterious shapes at the bottom of Erwin's stone are a depiction of its parking spaces, with the What3Words logo between them. The drawing in the bottom left-hand corner of the stone has a tilted square inside it, and this corresponds with a 3m² What3Words location in the corner of the car park. The combination of words representing this space? "Back, This, Spring".

ERWIN RETURNS

Fired by the prospect of Erwin's return, I tracked down Paul Smith of Busty Kelp CGI. Suggesting in an email that he might be a "close associate" of Erwin, I requested an interview with the enigmatic pixie-hunter himself. A few days passed before I received a reply.

"I have had a few people approach me about this subject," explained Paul. "But I can't directly help I'm afraid. However, there is a guy called Tom, claiming to be an associate of Erwin, who got in contact a while back, sending an apology in case I'd had too much unwanted attention..."

I FELT THAT I'D BETTER GET BACK OUT THERE AND DO SOMETHING

Freshly armed with the email address of the chap I assumed to be Erwin's frequently namechecked accomplice, I sent another request for an interview with the man himself. Again, several days passed before I received a reply that kickstarted a splendidly entertaining string of messages.

"Erwin is often very unforthcoming," explained Tom, when he got in touch. "I mentioned your article to him when it came out. He was curious about it, but got a bit funny when I mentioned other subjects the *Fortean Times* explores. He's quite intolerant of paranormal beliefs in general... Erwin really is not the best at self-promotion. But

personally, I think it's a great idea, because the more coverage (and thus views) he gets, the more expeditions he can fund. So... thinking out loud here... what do you think about sending me the questions you want to ask? I'll see if I can figure out some marginally covert way of finding out the answers."

I did precisely this, and eagerly awaited a reply. Three days later, on 29 April 2021, a new 15-minute video was uploaded to Erwin's YouTube channel. Titled 'Unusual Pixie behaviour', it's the first of the films to name a specific location ("the outskirts of Dartmoor") and – indeed – to feature Tom himself, who appears on camera alongside the now luxuriantly hirsute pixie-hunter. The production values and cinematography have improved: incidental music, sumptuous cutaway shots and hand-drawn illustrations of pixie activity abound, and there are flashbacks to amateur camcorder footage from "about 10 years ago", seemingly showing younger versions of both men on a similar expedition. There is a fleeting, distant glimpse of a "standard Devonshire pixie" walking across the top of a rock formation, and Tom steps into a bog and has to wring out his socks.





ABOVE: One of Erwin's charming sketches of pixie activity.

THE INTERVIEW

Twelve days later, I received a further e-mail from Tom with an audio file attached. This, excitingly, was an 18-minute phone conversation with Erwin, in which Tom had indeed tried to weave my interview questions into a chat frequently derailed by Erwin's pre-occupation with retrieving a missing tool, stuck in the gap at the foot of his van door. It begins with Erwin seemingly confused about the nature of a Samoyed dog ("A Samurai?") before Tom attempts to pin down when exactly he began tracking the Morsus pixies. "That was a long time ago," comes the reply. "A very long time ago. YouTube... was your idea, wasn't it? That was 2016. But I'd been doing it for a long time before that." Curiously, Tom asks if remembering the music of the era might pinpoint a date. "The sort of tail end of punk," suggests Erwin. Perhaps somewhat incongruously, as he seems an unlikely Sham 69 fan. They then discuss the parking situation for a forthcoming trip to Wales, before Erwin opens up about pixie hotspots in other regions of the UK.

"They're pretty much everywhere," he confirms. "Dartmoor probably has about three year's worth of material itself. So we can go back there, and then Wales and the Brecons, and there are all the valleys and small hills and mountains. Up in Snowdonia... it's very rich up there. And that's just in Wales. They're all over the place, really. Down the coastline as well."

Tom presses him about the dangers of the Welsh expedition ("It depends what you mean by dangerous, I suppose") and asks why Erwin stopped posting videos for the best part of two years. At this part, the intrepid pixie-hunter becomes a little tetchy ("Why are you asking me all these weird questions?") but nevertheless expands a little on the reasons behind his disappearance.

"Originally you persuaded me into doing

it because you said it would be fun, and it did turn out to be fun," he explains. "But I think I had, at that point, probably about 800 subscribers or something... I didn't feel the urgency to keep on making them because it wasn't really helping me in terms of financing the operation.

"And then when lockdown happened I just sort of kept putting them off... which I felt terrible about, because obviously people were waiting. But I sort of lost interest for a while. And then when you told me that so many people were now looking at it, I thought 'Well OK...' It felt like I'd better get back out there and do something."

And the puzzle on the marker stone? Did he expect people to crack the code and solve the riddle?

"Of course, yes, eventually," says Erwin. "I thought it might take a couple of weeks, and I think it was less than that. I'm glad it didn't go on too much longer because I think people would have become bored or thought that it was some sort of hoax with no real solution." Clearly an enthusiastic puzzle fan, he also expresses an admiration for Kit Williams's best-selling 1979 treasure-hunting book, *Masquerade*.

Tom brings up the possibility of sponsorship to fund the videos, and Erwin references a new camping stove recently captured on camera: "I was actually filming today," he confirms. He also hints at the potential return of the "wyrms", the rather dangerous-looking lizard creature fleetingly glimpsed in a video entitled 'A New Faery Species', uploaded on 20 May 2019.

"I'm filming around the wyrm cave," he explains. "It's not safe at all. That's why I don't want to go down there on my own, and I'm surprised that you want to go down there. I'm sure you'll bottle out. The one that I saw appeared to be a juvenile, so it'll have a couple of years growth on it since that last

video. Or however long it was – two years? Three years? Certainly two years, so he'll be a bit bigger than he was."

"Also, I can't remember if I told you: I had a theory about the relationship between the pixies and the wyrms based on something I found on one of the documents from the Etherilogical Society..."

And that, essentially, is that. Erwin promises to expand more on this document during the Welsh expedition, and expresses further bemusement about the nature of the phone call. "I still don't know quite what you were calling about," he exclaims. Although when, in a subsequent email, I raised concerns about the ethics of having conducted the interview in this way, Tom reassured me. "I asked him... if he minded me telling anybody what he'd said and he said he didn't," he insisted. "So all good".

ERWINMANIA

On 19 May 2021, a new 11-minute video was uploaded: 'Trying to locate his hideout'. Erwin's enthusiastic use of a new stove, close to the location of the 2019 wyrm cave, suggests this is indeed the solo filming referenced during the phone call. He professes to be nervous, has to shelter from torrential rain, and catches brief footage of the pixie who – it is implied – fired the fatal hallucinogenic arrow that brought the first phase of filming to a close, two years earlier. It's as charmingly offbeat as ever: the latest instalment in an increasingly immersive world of pastoral strangeness that is proving to be an essential refuge for Erwin's growing army of fans. At time of writing, four days later, the two "comeback" videos alone had racked up 264,000 views. Erwinmania starts here.

◆ BOB FISCHER is the writer of FT's Haunted Generation column, a BBC radio presenter, and an enthusiast of folklore, strange music and retro pop.

IN THE WAKE OF MORAG

In an extract from his much-delayed memoir, Australian cryptozoologist **TONY HEALY** looks back to the summer of 1979, when he spent four months on a Scottish lake monster safari. Here, he recalls his time on the bonny banks of Loch Morar in search of its elusive resident.

Remote, beautiful Loch Morar is 11 miles (18km) long, up to one and a half miles (2.4km) wide and at least 1,050ft (320m) deep – the only lake in Britain deeper than Loch Ness. Although several dozen sightings of a Nessie-like creature known as "Morag" have been recorded there since 1887, Morar's monster tradition is nowhere near as well-documented as that of the larger loch. The comparative lack of data might be due to the sparseness of the area's population: only half a dozen cottages overlook the loch, and its shoreline is touched upon briefly by only one narrow road. Another factor is that many locals are reluctant to discuss Morag with outsiders.

The attention of monster enthusiasts was drawn to Loch Morar by a particularly dramatic incident that occurred there in August 1969. According to newspaper reports, two local men, Duncan McDonell and William Simpson, claimed that their boat had been rammed on the loch by a huge, three-humped water monster. Mr McDonell allegedly tried to fend the animal off with an oar while Mr Simpson fired at it with a .303 rifle.

When the story broke, several Loch Ness Investigation members, frustrated by their lack of progress, decided to try their luck with Loch Morar, believing its crystal-clear water and light boat activity would prove a better spot for surface photography than murky Loch Ness. In February 1970 they formed a new organisation called the Loch Morar Survey. A fascinating account of the Survey's early work appears in *The Search for Morag* (1972), in which Elizabeth Montgomery Campbell documented 33 sightings of Morag and proved, with the aid of biologist David Solomon, that Morar is large enough, and rich enough in fish, to support a colony of sizable predators. Ms Campbell and company discovered that the monster tradition at Morar is quite ancient and that, in days gone by, a sighting of the *Mhorag*¹ signalled the imminent death of a member of the Gillies Clan.

In the wake of the McDonnell-Simpson report, a *Manchester Guardian* journalist published what he claimed was part of an old



LEFT: Wrong-thinking, radical researcher Tony Healy at Loch Morar in 1979

THEIR BOAT HAD BEEN RAMMED BY A HUGE THREE-HUMPED WATER MONSTER

Scottish rhyme about the monster. Genuine or not, the little verse conveys perfectly Morar's slightly creepy atmosphere:

*Morag, Harbinger of Death,
Giant swimmer in deep-green Morar,
The loch that has no bottom...
There it is that Morag the monster lives.*

The quarter-mile (400m) long River Morar, which connects the loch to the sea, is often said to be the shortest in Great Britain. In the 1940s, its flow was modified by a small dam, built to provide hydro-electricity to nearby villages. Although a fish ladder allows salmon and other migratory fish to reach the loch, it is difficult to imagine monster-sized creatures clambering over the dam wall. Morag enthusiasts, therefore, assume she and her family reside in the loch 365 days of the year.

Just after the narrow road from Arisaig crosses the River Morar, a still narrower road

cuts away to the right and runs two and a half miles (4km) along the northern shore of the loch to the hamlet of Bracorina. Six hundred yards further on, at the end of a rough dirt road, is a beautiful little crescent of shingle called White Beach. As the friendly folk at nearby Bracorina Cottage usually allow visitors to camp on a field just above the beach, I pulled my trusty little camper van into a prime waterfront position and climbed out to look around.

ADRIAN & COMPANY

I wasn't the first visitor of the season. At the field's western end, just below

a small headland, was a neat line of 12 tents, and on the beach a small group of people were working on a large, odd-looking sailing boat. About 18ft (5.5m) long, the vessel was essentially just a rectangular wooden platform supported by two inflatable pontoons. As well as a large, square sail that gave it the look of a ghost ship from antiquity, the ingeniously constructed, seemingly unsinkable catamaran was equipped with a small outboard motor.

As I walked over for a closer look, a tall, unmistakable figure jumped down from the boat and strode up to greet me. It was Adrian Shine, monster hunter extraordinary. I wasn't really surprised to see Adrian, who'd told me he expected to get to Morar that summer. I was, however, surprised and pleased that he had so many people with him. My Morar visit wouldn't be so lonely after all.

With his intense energy, luxuriant black beard and piercing eyes, Adrian looked like the kind of chap who, a century ago, would have donned a pith helmet and tramped off into Africa in search of the source of the Nile or King Solomon's mines. Bitten by the monster bug in the mid-1960s, he was, by 1979, Field Leader of the Loch Ness and Morar Project (LNN&MP), formed in 1974 to carry on the work of the Loch Morar Survey and the recently defunct Loch Ness Investigation. It was difficult to imagine a better organised or more cohesive group than the LNN&MP. Consisting largely of keen, energetic young men and women from the south of England, and a few older hands like Adrian, Ricky Gardiner



ABOVE: The campsite of the Loch Ness and Morar Project on the shore of the loch. BELOW: Project leader Adrian Shine at White Beach, Morar, 1979

and Barry Bell, the outfit had a strong *esprit de corps* and was constantly engaged in innovative projects.

Those interesting and cheerful people were at Morar for the first half of my three-week Morag hunt, and although my approach to the mystery differed from theirs, I greatly enjoyed their company through the mainly wet and blustery days. Adrian's infectious enthusiasm probably had a lot to do with their high morale. Revelling in the foul weather, he strode around through the mud in his Wellington boots, laughing and joking, issuing orders, Mao cap at a jaunty angle, beard flying in the wind. During the mid-1970s the team built and experimented with a variety of ingenious inventions. One device, designed to search for bones in Morar's shallows, was the *Pequod*: a flat-bottomed boat that could be driven and steered by a single operator lying face-down over a glass panel in the bow. Another was a miniature fibreglass diving bell in which Adrian descended several times to depths of 50ft (15m) or more in the loch's clear water.

During the summer of 1979, however, Adrian and his crew were focusing mainly on the new catamaran, the prototype of a small flotilla of similar craft they hoped eventually to deploy at Ness as well as Morar. With its huge deck space, the craft could carry a dozen people as well as several large, hollow-tipped metal darts for lakebed sampling. Its large sail would enable it to silently cruise the loch on sonar sweeps. So roomy was the craft that a glass-walled hut could be bolted on, to form a floating laboratory. The boat's most remarkable feature, however, was that, when dismantled, it could be carried on the roof rack of a single car.

Anxious to distance itself from hoaxers like Frank Searle, mystics like Doc Shiels and "crackpots" like Ted Holiday, the LN&MP



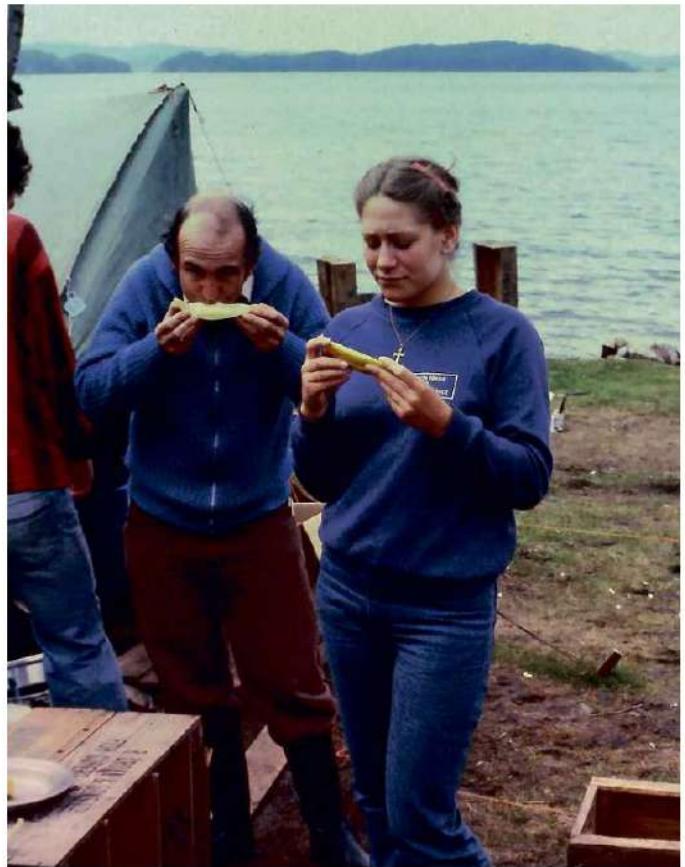
presented itself as a down-to-earth, scientifically oriented team, willing to undertake serious projects not necessarily related to monster hunting. To this end, it sometimes collaborated with the Universities of Edinburgh, Cambridge and London on scientific experiments. Its list of eminent patrons, including Lord Lovat, Lord Glendevon and Sir Peter Scott, lent the organisation an air of respectability. During the 1979 expedition the team was concentrating on lakebed sampling and on analysing the plankton content of the water. Its only overtly monster-related activity was a few experiments with a small underwater TV camera.

Although most of its members were privately fascinated by the possible existence of lake monsters, the organisation's leaders were so keen to be seen as methodical, scientific and conservative that, in public, they constantly played down the Morag-hunting

side of their activities. That awkward stance led to rather odd behaviour for monster hunters: even though they had a craft that was as ideal for surface photography as it was for lakebed probing, they never took as much as a single camera out on the loch. Neither did they mount a camera on the White Beach headland – an ideal vantage point from which to scan large stretches of water where Morag had reportedly surfaced on at least a dozen occasions. The rationale for this "no cameras" policy was that the Project officially considered surface watching to be a long-discredited "regressive method" and a total waste of time.² As the Dinsdale film was still the most interesting piece of evidence ever obtained at Loch Ness, I found this bit of dogma rather disconcerting.

It seemed clear that charismatic, strong-willed Adrian was responsible for the organisation's conservative stance. One day, as he took me for a demonstration cruise on the Project's mighty flagship, he said that he thought of himself as an "extreme right-winger" when it came to acceptance of evidence. Nursing the tiller and puffing on his ever-present pipe, he gleefully indulged in a little low-keyed faction fighting, telling me that whereas he once considered Tim Dinsdale to be "middle of the road", evidence-wise, he now feared that the veteran investigator was "drifting further and further to the left" because of his acceptance of the controversial Doc Shiels photos. Tut tut. No doubt Ted Holiday – and, increasingly, me – would be ranked as wrong-thinking radicals on Adrian's "political" spectrum.

But while I thought the Project members unnecessarily cautious when it came to accepting evidence, I also thought there was plenty of room – and a definite need – for a disciplined, conservative group such as theirs within the motley ranks of monster hunters. The team's



ABOVE: Some of the LN&MP crew: Ricky Gardiner and the project's quartermaster.

at great speed. About 500 yards away at first, it was between the islands and the southern shore, and most of its back, in a three-hump aspect, was visible, with no water separating the light-brown humps. As they approached, the huge beast turned and sped towards them, just below the surface, passing within 30 or 40 feet (9 to 12m), raising a large, churning wake before diving into deeper water.

An even more dramatic story was shared with me by Charles Simpson, a leading citizen of Mallaig. On 27 November 1975, Mr Simpson and his late brother Donald were driving from Mallaig towards Bracorina on a bird watching expedition. As the tiny River Morar leaves the loch, it flows over a narrow gravel bar, so that for a short distance it is only a couple of feet deep. At 3pm, just as they were passing that spot, Charles, who was watching the road ahead, heard his brother suddenly gasp and choke as if unable to breathe. "I was terrified that he'd taken a heart attack, but then he braked and pointed to the river. 'This will startle the world!' was all he could say at first. When I asked what that meant he said, 'Did ye not see it?'"

What Donald had seen was a powerful, 20-ft (6m) long animal that rose out of the river, lurched across the shingle bar and sank into the deep waters of the loch. Although the episode took only a couple of seconds, it made a profound impression on the witness – a man who had previously been very sceptical of the Morag legend. "Donald said it had smooth brown skin, 'like a drum,'" Charles continued. "He particularly noticed the muscles in its powerful hind quarters as it 'humped itself' over the ridge. He saw no ears or eyes, but he said there was what looked like a 'trunk' trailing along the side of the body."

As night fell over Mallaig, Charles took me to see his late brother's widow, Jessie Simpson. A kind, motherly lady, she insisted I stay for a delicious home-cooked meal, and later showed me a painting of what her husband had seen in the river. The painting had been done by a neighbour, Willie Kirk, under Donald Simpson's close supervision. "Donald said it wasn't exactly right," she explained, "but that it conveyed the general impression of what he saw."

On my second visit to Loch Morar, in 1999, I was lucky enough to meet Willie Kirk, the talented neighbour who had executed the painting. Mr Kirk, who kindly granted me permission to publish the illustration, recalled that Mr Simpson said it was a fairly good depiction of what he saw. Donald had been certain that there had been a trunk-like appendage, but the sighting was so brief, and so unexpected, that he couldn't be sure whether the "trunk" was trailing backwards along the creature's side from the front, or whether it originated at the back and was swung forward alongside the body. Donald said that Willie had depicted the powerful hindquarters fairly accurately. Rotating his shoulders and elbows,

leadership rejected virtually all of the still photographs that were generally put forward as evidence for Nessie's existence, and most of the points they raised about them were valid.

A SELECTION OF SIGHTINGS

Although the people who live around the loch are sometimes reluctant to discuss the monster with outsiders, perhaps because Morag was once considered to be a "harbinger of death", I did manage to meet and interview several eyewitnesses.

John MacVarish was known to have had three sightings. It took a while, but I eventually cornered the quiet, middle-aged man on the wharf at the nearby coastal village of Mallaig and persuaded him to share his recollections. His first experience occurred in ideal conditions – on a bright, sunny mid-morning in August 1968. He was out in his boat, on dead calm water, halfway across the loch opposite Bracorina, when he saw what he took at first to be a man standing up in a boat, then realised it was a long neck protruding five or six feet (1.5 to 1.8m) out of the water. As he drew closer, he saw that the neck, about 18 inches (46cm) wide at the bottom, tapered up

MORAG WAS ONCE CONSIDERED TO BE A HARBINGER OF DEATH

to a small, dark, snake-like head. The creature, apparently unconcerned at first by the boat's proximity, proceeded along slowly, leaving a short wake behind its neck. It remained in sight for about 10 minutes, until John got to within 300 yards, then "settled down slowly into the loch."

John's second experience, which occurred on another bright, sunny day in August of the following year, was considerably more dramatic. At midday, as he and James Hanratty were boating through the western end of the loch, they saw a creature they estimated to be a full 30ft (9m) long, cutting through the water

he'd demonstrated how the creature had "humped itself" over the gravel bar, by shovelling and lifting with its hind legs or flippers.

Donald Simpson, like his brother and widow, seems to have been a very fine person. Citizens of Mallaig to whom I spoke said he'd been a pillar of society – an elder of the Church, respectable and very well liked. Just as importantly, he was a recognised authority on the area's wildlife. He was also *too close* to have been mistaken. When I visited the spot, it became clear that the creature could have been no more than 40 feet (12m) from the road at the time of the sighting. As soon as I set eyes on Willie Kirk's painting, I was put in mind of the creature seen crossing General Wade's Military Road, on the eastern shore of Loch Ness, by Mr and Mrs George Spicer on 22 July 1933 (see FT308:42, 347:55).³

Whereas the creature seen by Donald Simpson was only half out of the water, there is another story, recorded in 1961 by R Macdonald Robertson, in which Morag is said to have actually ventured ashore. The incident supposedly occurred sometime around 1950 when Mr Alexander Macdonell was transporting a group of children from Meoble to Morar in the estate boat: "... just as they were passing Bracorina Point, some of the children shouted out: 'Oh look! What is that that big thing on the bank over there?' Mr Macdonell described the beast as being 'about the size of a full-grown Indian elephant', and said it plunged off the rocks into the water with a terrific splash."⁴

As both Macdonell and Robertson had passed away by the time she began her research in the late 1960s, Elizabeth Montgomery Campbell considered that the story should "be treated as apocryphal" until one of the children came forward to confirm it. There has been no word from those kids as yet, but in light of the Spicers' experience and other reports of creatures lumbering around on the bonny banks of Loch Ness, I'm not entirely sceptical of the story.



ABOVE: Portrait of a monster by Willie Kirk, under the supervision of Donald Simpson. The creature was moving from right-to-left. BELOW: The shallows where Morag crossed the shingle bar, seen from the road.

I found one multiple-witness Morag episode particularly interesting. In *The Search for Morag*, Elisabeth Montgomery Campbell told how, at about 11 o'clock one morning in July 1964, Adam Malcolm, his wife and a friend watched a monster from the window of their house at Bracorina. Mr Malcolm, a Perthshire headmaster, estimated that the creature, which was lying in the water between Lettermorar Rock and Lettermorar House, was about 14ft (4m) long. There was nothing particularly odd about the appearance of the creature – it was the familiar one-hump, "upturned boat" shape – but there was something decidedly strange about how it came into view.

"The most curious thing about the whole incident," Mr Malcolm told Campbell, "is the way three people were drawn, independently, to look out at the same time, and the feeling was experienced of something benign – something beyond explanation or definition."⁵

As the Malcolms were in the habit of visiting Bracorina every summer, I located them

easily enough, and, although her husband was reluctant to talk about it, Mrs Malcolm kindly provided me with a few more details of the sighting.

On that morning 15 years earlier, she said, Mr Malcolm had been reading in the sitting room of the cottage when he experienced quite an eerie sensation: the hair on the back of his neck actually rose, and he felt a sudden strong compulsion to turn and look out the window. Simultaneously, Mrs Malcolm and a friend – who were in different parts of the house – felt drawn to the sitting room. They entered just as Mr Malcolm turned to the window – and all three saw the creature on the loch.

The local clans had always considered Morag to be sinister and menacing, but the Malcolms and their friend gained the strong impression of something quite benign: "It was a strange feeling, and I know it sounds odd, but it was as if the creature was showing us that it simply *belonged* there – as a part of the loch, a part of nature."

NEXT MONTH: *I meet the Hermit of Loch Morar – and the monster gets up-close and personal...*

NOTES

1 Pronounced "Vorack" in Gaelic. "Morag" is a relatively recent, anglicised version of the name.

2 LN&MP Report, 1980, p2.

3 Rupert T Gould, *The Loch Ness Monster*, pp43-46; Constance Whyte, *More Than a Legend*, pp77-79 and FW Holiday, *The Great Orm of Loch Ness*, p31.

4 R Macdonald Robertson, *Selected Highland Folktales*, quoted by Elisabeth Montgomery Campbell in *The Search for Morag*, 1972, pp116-117.

5. Ibid, p127.

TONY HEALY is an Australian author and researcher who has investigated all kinds of high strangeness around the world. He is the co-author, with Paul Cropper, of *Out of the Shadows: Mystery animals of Australia* (1994) and *The Yowie: In Search of Australia's Bigfoot* (2006).





WEIRD WHEELS OF THE WOLDS

ROB GANDY continues his ongoing investigation of Lincolnshire liminalities, turning his attention to a lesser-known type of road ghost. The wartime airfields and lonely highways of the county appear to be host to a wide variety of two-wheeled phantoms, from vanishing airmen on pushbikes to a ghostly lass killed in a motorcycle accident...

This article details stories about paranormal events in the county of Lincolnshire in which two-wheeled vehicles were involved. The witnesses contacted me in response to my call for stories about The Ruskgarton Horror, (see FT401:32-38, 402:38-43), and although there was no connection with this specific phenomenon their experiences deserve a wider audience.¹ I confess that none of them actually took place in the Lincolnshire Wolds proper, which is a designated Area of Natural Beauty, but I couldn't resist the alliterative title. Bikes are comparatively uncommon in the panoply of phantom hitchhikers and road ghosts, although there are examples (see FT358:42-47), which makes them particularly intriguing.

THE FOSDYKE SAGA

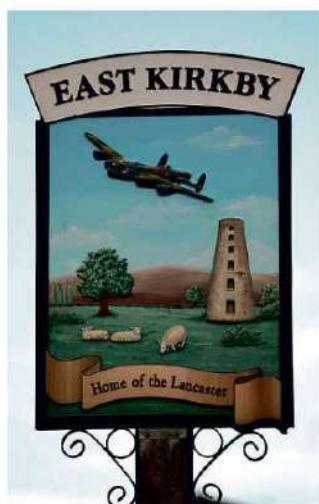
Around the year 2000, Ms A was travelling alone, north along the A17 from Holbeach towards Sutterton. She was returning from her work as a nurse in a very challenging environment. Therefore, although she might have been through a gruelling 12-hour shift from 9am to 9pm, her mental state was no different to that after every such shift. She recalls that it was probably around midnight that she actually got away; being delayed in leaving was par for the course. As was her wont, she opted for the therapeutic effects of a blast of Robert Palmer on the car CD player.

It must have been April or May, and fine weather, because she had her driver's window fully open. With no other traffic on the road she put her foot down and was possibly travelling slightly in excess of the 70mph (113km/h) speed limit. She was on the long stretch of road at Fosdyke, which has very good street lighting, when she was startled by a motor-

FOR THE DRIVER / GETTY IMAGES



LEFT: Lincolnshire boasts reports of two-wheeled spooks from WWII airfields at Metheringham and East Kirkby.



bike (complete with very loud engine noise) appearing close behind her in her rear-view mirror; she estimates that it was less than 10ft (3m) behind her car – not quite 'kissing distance' as she says. This was very sudden, as she is certain that she would have been aware of its approach if it had been catching up from behind. She could only really make out the very bright headlight, rather than the features of the rider or motorbike itself, due to its

close proximity to the back of her car partially obscuring it. The motorbike did not make any visible effort to pull out and overtake, and it stayed in this position for the next two minutes – which would have involved a distance of well over two miles (3.2km). Then, just as suddenly as it had appeared, the motorbike disappeared. As she recollects, both sight and sound ceased simultaneously. This really perturbed Ms A, who knew there were no side roads to explain its appearance or its disappearance. Nevertheless, she didn't feel at all scared or threatened by the motorbike. She has driven that route many times, both before and after this experience, but has seen nothing untoward. Even after all these years her memory of the incident is very clear.

THE METHERINGHAM LASS

There was a wartime RAF airfield at Metheringham, which is approximately eight miles (13km) east of the A15, between Lincoln and Sleaford. Local author Bruce Barrymore Halpenny, who wrote the *Ghost Stations* series of books,² received many reports of a ghostly



ABOVE: The stretch of A17 near Fosdyke where Ms A had her curious encounter. BELOW: The Metheringham Lass caught on camera? Well, perhaps in a certain light...

figure standing in the road that crosses part of the old airfield, with witnesses including both RAF personnel and civilians.³ Stories from a range of sources describe a woman wearing a jacket with RAF insignia who approaches cars and sometimes interacts with them. She begs the driver to help her boyfriend, who has been injured in a motorbike accident; but when the driver gets out of the car, the woman has vanished, and there is no sign of the boyfriend. Apparently, there can be an accompanying smell of lavender, followed by the odour of decomposing flesh.⁴

Halpenny's investigations determined that this phantom was probably that of 19-year-old Catherine Bystock, from Horn castle, to whom he gave the title 'The Metheringham Lass'. Towards the end of WWII Catherine had been to a local dance with her fiancé, a Flight Sergeant from the base. She was riding pillion on his motorbike on the way home when the motorbike skidded on wet surfacing at the base and crashed, with Catherine being thrown from the motorbike and killed instantly, sustaining serious head injuries (her fiancé survived). The crash occurred close to where sightings are said to occur in the summer months, usually at around 9.30pm – the time of the accident – and always after dusk starts to fall.⁵ In 2009 the Spalding Paranormal Investigations team, led by Mark Stretton, claimed to have caught an image of the ghost on camera.⁶

I subsequently heard from Garry Ross of the Lincs Paranormal Research Team⁷ that this story has "not an ounce of truth to any of

CATHERINE WAS THROWN FROM THE MOTORBIKE AND KILLED INSTANTLY

it". He suggests that it was all made up by a worker employed to undertake renovations at the airfield; Catherine Bystock never existed and there was no motorbike crash. He admits that this is rather disappointing.

SCUNTHORPE SCARE

It was around 11.15pm on Thursday 23 November 1978 that Joe (pseudonym) was travelling home to Ashby having dropped off his father-in-law and two brothers-in-law at Digby Street



in Scunthorpe. His route took him down Brigg Road (A1029) in a southerly direction. The weather was cold and dry, with a crisp snow cover in various scattered areas. He crossed over the railway bridge by Alexander Road and was opposite the Rowland Road junction (on his right) when he found himself travelling about 200 yards behind a young couple riding on a moped. They seemed to be in perfect control of the moped as they reached the left turn to the main approach road to the British Steel Offices. Suddenly Joe saw what he can only describe as "a hazy, ghostly apparition" start to glide across the road from the right from a field adjoining Rowland Road. The 'apparition' then passed completely through the moped and shook it violently to and fro so that the helpless and terrified boy and girl were thrown off into the road. The 'apparition' then continued gliding through the fencing before disappearing through the metal sheeting into the old Heavy Section Beam mill.

Joe slowed down, with the intention of stopping to help the couple, but when he arrived at the spot where they had lost control of the moped, his own car began to shake and it turned very cold inside. Fortunately, a taxi was coming up in the opposite, northerly direction, and the driver turned round at the Rowland Road junction and came back to join them. He too had witnessed what had happened and was able to call his office from his cab phone to ask them to phone for an ambulance. The boy had sustained a badly cut leg and a damaged shoulder, with grazes to his hands, and his girlfriend had grazing to her leg and face, and cuts and bleeding to her eyebrow. When all four had gathered their composure, they questioned each other about

what had just happened. Nobody could say for certain. All Joe could think of was that it was a ghost – he was aware of other reports of other cars and motorbikes mysteriously crashing through walls and fencing and ending up in British Steel property adjacent to that stretch of road. He also claims that there is a long history of fatal accidents on that particular section of road. Joe could not wait for the ambulance to arrive because he had to get home to his poorly wife, and so the taxi driver (who Joe knew personally from working at British Steel Road Transport Department) stayed with the injured couple. Unfortunately, the taxi driver is now deceased and Joe lost the names of the boy and girl, so he is not able to get them to corroborate this story from over 40 years ago; but there is no doubt that this was an extremely strange, frightening and dangerous event which involved four witnesses.

RIDING ROUND IN CIRCLES

Jack (pseudonym) was 27 years old when his father was rushed as an emergency to Grantham Hospital on New Year's Eve 1973. Although Jack worked in Grantham, over the next 12 days he would go back home to Aunsby, have his tea and then take his mother

on the round trip to visit his father. The route took them through Oasby and Welby, and up to the B6403 (the old Roman Road 'Ermine Street'), which is called the 'High Dyke' locally, before heading for Grantham via Loddonthorpe. On one occasion, around 7.30pm, he turned left on to the 'High Dyke'; there was only one car coming in the opposite direction, but it was some way off. The night was clear and dry, and ahead of him he saw a man riding a 'sit up and beg' bicycle on his side of the road, wearing a long dark overcoat and a cap. The man showed up in the dipped headlights, and on the right-hand side of his bike wheel frame a square red light was clearly visible, as it should have been. The man was riding a lot further out into the road than people would normally do and, because of the oncoming car, Jack slowed down and stayed behind him. His mother asked "What are you doing?" to which he replied "I'm keeping behind that bike." Puzzled, his mother said: "What bike? I can't see any bike!" And all the time the perfectly normal-looking man was pedalling away in front of Jack.

Suddenly, as the other car approached on the opposite side of the road, a circle of fog appeared – approximately 20ft (6m) in diameter – looking like a massive tyre around the cyclist. Jack then knew something was wrong, and so stayed behind the solid-looking man who continued his pedalling. The circle of fog became smaller and smaller, and Jack could see the cyclist still pedalling inside it. But when it became a lump of fog that just covered the man and his bike, the man, his bike and the fog completely disappeared, leaving nothing but clear road ahead. Jack immediately stopped the car, with the other car now having passed by in the opposite direction.

SUDDENLY, JOE SAW WHAT HE CAN ONLY DESCRIBE AS "A HAZY, GHOSTLY APPARITION"



ABOVE: The 'High Dyke' just past the Welby turn-off, where Jack saw the bizarre spectacle of a cyclist in a contracting ring of fog.



LEFT: The aircraft spotter's car park at RAF Coningsby, where Dave and Chris saw a pedalling pilot who promptly vanished. Ghost, time slip or rogue re-enactor like the chap pictured below?

who frequent the aircraft spotters' car park and some say that they have also seen the mystery airman, who has also been reported many times on roads around East Kirkby. One theory is that it's the ghost of a pilot killed in a nearby aircraft crash during WWII. Whatever it was that Dave and Chris saw that day – a ghost or a time slip – it certainly left a lasting impression on them.

CONCLUSIONS

There can be no doubt that the above events represent very diverse phantom hitchhiker/ road ghost phenomena, all within the uncommon 'two-wheeled' subgenre. One interesting point is that multiple witnesses were involved in three of the four first-hand testimonies, and yet in one case one person saw the phantom while the other saw nothing. It only goes to highlight the complex and bizarre nature of these incidents, with some really stretching credibility: a talking revenant; a contracting circle of mist that engulfs a cyclist; and something that can sweep across a road and knock a couple off their moped. And all of this just in Lincolnshire!

But as we will see in future instalments, even stranger things have happened to people across this one very weird English county... watch this space!

NOTES

- 1 www.lincolnshirelive.co.uk/news/local-news/haunted-stretch-lincolnshire-road-left-3455381
- 2 www.bbhw.zulem.com/Bruce_Barrymore_Hal-penny_Aviation_Military_Books1.html

3 I came across this story online while searching for information rather than receiving a direct approach from a witness. However, as it is well-documented and wasn't quoted in *Uneasy Riders* (**FT358:42-47**) I decided to include it here.

- 4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metheringham_Lass

5 www.bbc.co.uk/lincolnshire/content/articles/2009/10/27/metheringham_lass_feature.shtml

6 www.lincolnshirelive.co.uk/news/local-news/ghostly-image-war-time-airwoman-caught-98258. I must confess that I cannot make out any specific features. Given that Spalding Paranormal Investigations does not appear to be currently operating, I tried to contact Mark via Lincolnshire Live, who indicated they could not help because GDPR rules require people's personal contact information to be deleted from records after a certain time. After all, the article is over 10 years old; but it did say that Catherine's ghost "has made regular appearances", so travellers might still be waved down and asked for their help.

- 7 www.lincsprt.com/

• ROB GANDY is a Visiting Professor at Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University and a regular contributor to FT. A lifelong fortean, he has eclectic interests in all things weird, including phantom hitchhikers, ghosts, strange sports and folk customs, time slips and synchronicities.



10 minutes, leaning on the car bonnet facing the base and listening to the sounds of nature, when a man in his mid-30s steadily rode past them on a sit-up-and-beg type pushbike. He came from their right, heading up towards Coningsby village, and was on the public road rather than the road inside the base's perimeter fencing. He looked like a pilot and was dressed in green overalls and a flying jacket with an RAF chip hat on his head. The man said something to the two lads and they responded by saying "Hello Sir!" He waved back and said "Alright boys!" before carrying on down the road. The lads looked at one another, but after a couple of seconds Dave turned round to look at the airman again – only to find that he had vanished into thin air. Given the flatness of the area, the length of the road, and the fencing around the base, there was simply no way that he could have disappeared from sight. Dave and Chris looked at each other again, and went pale. Determined to investigate, Dave got into his car and drove along the road to look for the airman, but he was nowhere to be seen. The whole episode had taken between four and five minutes and so wasn't a simple misperception. Dave has subsequently spoken to several people

THE PEDALLING PILOT

One lovely evening around sunset in 1996, Dave (pseudonym) and his best friend Chris were alone at the aircraft spotters' car park for RAF Coningsby on Dogdyke Road (just south of the sewage works). They were watching planes and soaking up the atmosphere of the countryside. They had been there about

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Twists and turns on a trail to nowhere

MARK FOX welcomes a new book taking a fresh approach to the ongoing mystery of Flight MH370

The disappearance of flight MH370 on 8 March 2014 (FT345:12, 352:8) constitutes one of the quintessential mysteries of our age. Fundamental questions remain as to the reasons for the disappearance of the doomed flight and the location of its final resting place. Seven years on, despite millions of words of analysis and explanation, the enigma of MH370 remains unrivalled in the annals of commercial aviation.

Odd, then, that until recently no attempt had been made to pull all of the information together into one overarching study, despite the publication of over 100 books exploring the fate of the doomed flight. The publication of Florence De Changy's *The Disappearing Act: The Impossible Case of MH370* might change that. De Changy joins a growing number of MH370 researchers – 'MHists' as she calls them – in suggesting an alternative rendering of accepted events: that the plane did not turn back over Malaysia before heading south into the Southern Indian Ocean but, instead, carried on along its intended flight path before meeting with a tragic end somewhere over the South China Sea.

It's hard to exaggerate what a deviation this is from the official narrative. Up until now, the accepted view has been that somebody – the pilot, perhaps – made a hard-left turn at waypoint IGARI, at the exact hand-over point from Malaysian to Vietnamese Air Traffic Control (ATC), before flying back across the Malaysian peninsula, around the tip of Indonesia, and south into the vast nothingness of the Southern Indian Ocean. De

Changy's scenario accepts none of this. For her, and thanks in part to what we know from ATC exchanges subsequent to IGARI, MH370 simply flew on over the South China Sea, reaching the next waypoint before being shot down: far from deviating from its original heading, MH370 simply kept flying north-east until its flight was abruptly and tragically terminated.

She pulls together a lot of data in support of this view, examining everything from radar records and ATC transcripts to the discovery of alleged 'wreckage' at Reunion Island. Strangely, though, she almost entirely neglects to examine the 'smoking gun' that might, ironically, clinch her case: the reboot of the satellite communication system (SATCOM) at 18:24:27 UTC which gave rise to the alleged satellite data 'pings' crucial to the official narrative of MH370's final resting place being in the Southern Indian Ocean. Given the centrality of this curious reboot to the narrative she rejects, it is hard to understand why De Changy pays it such scant attention. Certainly, the calculations to which it gave rise turned out to be complex – but not *that* complex; and any interested layperson can understand the implications, which have been in the public domain for a while. On Monday 30 July 2018, the final report into the disappearance of flight MH370 was published, running to 1,500 pages. However, it failed to explain *why* the SATCOM rebooted in-flight just before 18:25 after an interruption that could have lasted for anything from 22 to 78 minutes. This cannot be stressed enough: the SATCOM question remains key (see my letter, FT371:74-75). Even the July 2018 report described it as 'abnormal.' In fact, rebooting in-flight is highly unusual; much rests on it, given that without this restoration of power there would have been no ensuing sequence of 'handshakes' with an orbiting satellite owned by British company INMARSAT, allowing investigators

to determine that the aircraft had reached a terminus somewhere in the Southern Indian Ocean.

What, then, of this curious reboot? In addition to its sheer inexplicability, other oddities surround it. Aviation journalist Jeff Wise, long interested in the case, has drawn attention to its timing. After turning back at waypoint IGARI, the plane was allegedly tracked by Malaysian radar until it disappeared from view, heading to the northwest, at 18:22:12 UTC. The reboot occurred at 18:24:27 when power was mysteriously and inexplicably restored to the SATCOM. Coincidence or something else? After all, there is no way that anybody piloting the plane could have been aware in real time of when it had passed out of radar coverage. De Changy argues in *The Disappearing Act* that the radar data supplied by the Malaysians is itself spurious and that subsequent ATC exchanges completely refute the notion of a turn-back at IGARI. Given all this, it's not difficult to see how a 'false trail' could have been planted: first by a false radar plot back across Malaysian airspace, then by a false 'breadcrumb trail' of INMARSAT data 'pings' leading the search for the plane on a futile goose chase into the middle of nowhere.

Lest this sounds like conspiracy theory, four other key factors are worth considering. Firstly, the fact that the extensive underwater searches have so far failed to turn up a single trace of wreckage, to the extent that search efforts have effectively been abandoned. Secondly, the fact that no other information exists with which to corroborate the INMARSAT data 'trail'. Thirdly, the curious fact that the initial log-on signal after the reboot generated a signal radically different from the subsequent ones (which nobody has been able to explain). And fourthly, the fact that INMARSAT engineers and executives themselves had at least considered the possibility of a 'spoof' when first analysing their 'ping data'.

This latter point is worth noting. In a BBC interview in the aftermath of the disappearance, INMARSAT engineer Alan Schuster-Bruce admitted that one of the first concerns they'd had was that the data trail "could just be a big hoax that someone... played on INMARSAT." INMARSAT's VP for aviation, David Cooley, asserted that the company was "confident that this data is correct assuming that there is no way this data has been spoofed." Despite later company comments rowing back from the 'spoof' possibility, it is worth noting that researchers unattached to INMARSAT but with considerable knowledge of the investigation have urged caution. In this regard, Jeff Wise cites oceanographer David Gallo, who led the effort to locate the wreckage of Air France 447 in 2008: "I never accepted the [MH370] satellite data from day one... I never thought I'd say this... I think there is a good chance that MH370 never came south at all. Let's put it this way, I don't accept the evidence that the plane came south."

Neither does Florence De Changy, whose book looks set to reignite the debate, among MHists at least. Meanwhile, the wider discussions rumble on, with many – such as Independent Group member Victor Iannello – continuing to assert the veracity of the data and producing refinements of analysis which it is claimed will finally pinpoint the location of the plane's actual terminus. For others, De Changy included, the mystery remains open, the accepted narrative questionable at every turn.

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Ghosts in classical Chinese philosophy

IAN JAMES KIDD examines the differing ways in which Chinese philosophers approached the subject of ghosts and spirits

Ancient China recognised various kinds of spirits or ghosts (*guǐ*). An early philosopher, Mozi, grouped them into "the ghosts of Heaven, the ghosts of the mountains and rivers, and the ghosts of men who have died". Some were friendly to humans, others hostile. Some took the form of humans or animals. Others were formless. Such beliefs run through Chinese history, religion, and literature. Think of such classic collections of stories of the supernatural as *Soushen Ji* (*Anecdotes about Spirits and Immortals*, c. 350) and Pu Songling's *Liaozhai Zhiyi* (*Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*) of 1740. These stories of spirits and immortals are didactic, used to condemn feudalism, corruption, and the exploitation of the poor – a strategy of concealing critique in the fantastical used, centuries later, by Rod Serling in *The Twilight Zone*.

The moral significance of spirits and ghosts ensured that they were discussed by philosophers. The main schools of classical Chinese philosophy all emerged during the violence and instability of the Period of the Warring States, 430–221 BC. Common to all the schools was an effort to diagnose and respond to that unfolding moral chaos, even if the specifics varied enormously. We find most of the interest coming from Confucius and his followers and the shorter-lived, lesser-known school of Mozi. They differ about all sorts of issues, including ghosts and spirits. The big questions are whether Confucius and Mozi believed in ghosts, and, if they did, what they



thought our attitudes to them ought to be.

Confucius famously declared that his goal was to preserve the traditions of the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BC). This included belief in Shàngdì, 'the Lord of Heaven', most powerful of all the ancestor spirits, elevated during the Zhou into a supreme moral force, source of the Mandate of Heaven (*Tiānmìng*) which conferred authority on the ruler. Zhou practices included offering sacrifices to ancestor spirits who might, at times, intercede on behalf of their descendants. It was vital to maintain good relations with those spirits, mainly through offering sacrifices that were conducted in the correct ways. Confucius inherited all of this – his ethics focuses on an ideal of 'ritual correctness' and

It's tough to work out Confucius's own views on ghosts and spirits

his disciples are warned not to make sacrifices without the right attitudes of reverence, awe, and respectfulness.¹

Similar warnings were offered to disciples who asked about serving ghosts and spirits. Asked by one disciple how best to serve ghosts and spirits, Confucius bluntly replied that, unable to serve people, how could he ever hope to serve ghosts and spirits and understand death?² Western commentators interpret this as a

LEFT: An illustration for *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*. FACING PAGE: The philosopher Confucius.

sign of Confucian 'humanism', the moral injunction to focus on the everyday world of human life, not distract oneself by speculating about the supernatural and the afterlife. Other readings, though, suggest that care of spirits and ghosts is more difficult, thus reserved for only the most able. Confucius elsewhere advises "respecting the ghosts and spirits while keeping them at a distance," and not entangling their affairs with our own. A minister, for instance, is criticised for trying to curry favour with spirits with acts of extravagance.³

It's tough to work out Confucius's own views on spirits and ghosts. A snag is that we're told he did not discuss, among other things, 'prodigies' and the supernatural. This principled silence is explained in terms of their being irrelevant to the fundamental task of human life – ethical self-cultivation.⁴ But that's clearly wrong. Our attitudes to spirits and ghosts can be assessed as respectful or presumptuous, appropriate or extravagant. Moreover, Confucius did discuss ghosts and spirits! A blunt solution was offered by a later Confucian thinker, Xunzi. It is to embrace a form of naturalism – roughly, denial of the supernatural and seeking only natural explanations of the world. Divination, for instance, does not provide knowledge of future events, but serves certain social and emotional functions, even though "the common people look upon it as connecting with spirits".⁵

No such ambivalence and reductive naturalism is visible in the philosophy of Mozi, an intriguing figure – a warrior, engineer, philosopher, and the author of an essay entitled "On Ghosts". This contains the famous story of King Xuan, who killed his minister, Du Bo, who swore revenge before expiring. A few years



later, the king was hunting with several thousand soldiers when, at high noon, Du Bo appeared in a chariot. The ghost pursued the king and "shot him as he rode in his chariot; the arrow pierced the king's heart and splintered his spine. King Xuan collapsed in his chariot and, draped over his own bow case, he died."⁶

Interestingly, Mozi proceeds to offer a philosophical analysis of this episode using his so-called 'three gauges' (*sān biāo*).⁷ These are systematic tests to help us determine whether one should accept or reject a claim. First, is there *precedent* for the belief in ghosts and spirits, to which the clear answer was, overwhelmingly, yes. Second, is there *evidence*, specifically as gained through the senses. "If there really are people who have heard and seen something, then you must accept that such things exist. If no one has heard or seen anything, then you must accept that such things do not exist." Clearly, many people had seen and interacted with ghosts and spirits. In the case of Du Bo, thousands of people witnessed him, at high noon with the physical evidence of the pierced heart and shattered spine of King Xuan.

The third 'gauge' is rather different. Mozi urges us to ask if belief in ghosts and spirits has *application*, in the sense of advancing the security and stability of the state. Interestingly, the answer is, again, yes. "If the ability of ghosts and spirits to reward the worthy and punish the wicked could be firmly established as fact throughout the empire and among the common people, it would surely bring order to the state and great benefit to the people." A skilled thief or murderer might evade detection and punishment by humans, but not by ghosts and spirits. No matter how far you flee, no matter how carefully you conceal your crimes, "the ghosts and spirits will see what you do!"⁸

Obviously, the third gauge assesses the *utility* of beliefs, not their *truth*. Plenty of false beliefs are useful and true beliefs don't necessarily bring "great benefit to the people". Some commentators thus suggest Mozi didn't *really* believe in ghosts



and spirits. It's just prudent, sometimes, to encourage belief in avenging spirits for reasons of crime-reduction. Such sceptics point to Mozi's remark that, even if ghosts and spirits don't exist, they're useful in "gathering people and increasing fellowship among people".⁹ Sceptics also challenge the three gauges – why uncritically defer to prior experiences, which might be explained away as superstitions, exaggerations, or appeals to authority?¹⁰

Many modern readers seem to think that Mozi clearly couldn't have actually *believed* in ghosts and spirits. He was philosophically astute and practically-minded – his 'day job' was as the leader of a paramilitary army. More generally, Mohists made important advances in mechanics, optics, and logic.¹¹ It's also pointed out that Mozi unlike effete Confucians, came from a humbler social background. This might explain his sympathy for folk religious beliefs.¹² He was too intelligent to believe in ghosts

and spirits, but still sympathetic to those who did.

Still, things are more complex. Mozi repeatedly affirms that ghosts and spirits do exist and asks how anyone can doubt it. Indeed, he warns of the risks of their abandoning us if we become too insouciant.¹³ Moreover, the confident claim that an intelligent person can't believe in ghosts is narrowminded. Plenty of intelligent people did, and still do, believe in ghosts and spirits.¹⁴ After all, Mozi argues his way into a belief in ghosts and spirits rather than just relying on flat assertion. Moreover, the three gauges are intellectual standards we ourselves employ – established precedent and empirical evidence are common to the practice of law, medicine, and science.¹⁵

I'm unsure what to make of Mozi's remarks. A recent scholar brackets the question of their reality, suggesting that his guiding concern was with establishing "the proper *dao* [way] by which to guide social and personal life".¹⁶ This fits Confucius's remarks, too:

understanding the living is more important than understanding the dead. It also fits the morally instructive aims of the *Soushen Ji* and *Liaozhai Zhiyi* – to call out corruption and celebrate acts of kindness and love. Taking this 'humanist' line also helps make Confucius and Mozi acceptable relative to the scientific convictions of modernity. Unfortunately, such explanations take for granted that ghosts and spirits don't exist – a claim that turns on complex metaphysical questions about the nature of reality. Exploring such issues would take us into deep waters. But that might be acceptable to Confucius and Mozi.

NOTES

References to Confucius are to *Anecdotes with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. Edward Slingerland (Indianapolis, Hackett, 2003). References to Xúnzǐ and Mòzǐ are to Philip J Ivanhoe and Bryan van Norden (eds.), *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Indianapolis, Hackett, 2005).

¹ *Lùnyǔ* 2.24 and 3.12.

² *Lùnyǔ* 11.12.

³ *Lùnyǔ* 6.22 and 5.18.

⁴ *Lùnyǔ* 7.21.

⁵ Xúnzǐ ch. 17.

⁶ Mòzǐ ch.31.

⁷ Mòzǐ ch.35.

⁸ Mòzǐ ch.31.

⁹ Mòzǐ ch.31.

¹⁰ Piotr Gibas, "Mozi and the Ghosts: The Concept of Ming in Mozi's 'Ming Gui'", *Early China* 40 (2017), pp89-123.

¹¹ Robin DS Yates, "The Mohists on Warfare: Technology, Technique, and Justification", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 47(3) (1980), pp549–603.

¹² AC Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (Illinois, Open Court, 1989), p47.

¹³ Mòzǐ ch. 25 and 31.

¹⁴ Bryan van Norden, *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Indianapolis, Hackett, 2011), pp66-67.

¹⁵ AC Graham, *Later Mohist Logic, Ethics and Science* (Hong Kong, Chinese University Press, 1978).

¹⁶ Chris Fraser, *The Philosophy of the Mòzǐ: The First Consequentialists* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2016), p69.

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The fantastical, magical and bizarre

Bob Rickard finds a new and wholly fresh mother lode of ‘true weird tales’ in this classic 18th-century collection of Chinese stories which Charles Fort would have loved

The Shadow Book of Ji Yun

The Chinese Classic of Weird True Tales, Horror Stories, and Occult Knowledge

Yi Izzy Yu & John Yu Branscum, eds & trans

Empress Wu Books 2021

Pb; 307pp, £14.99, ISBN 97819853124012

The Chinese genre of fantasy in fiction and drama has been widely embraced in the West where it has had a celebrated influence on the creative imagination behind some excellent films and games, despite its rather low-key reception by a generally uncaring public. For the aficionados then – who will definitely enjoy it – here is a new and wholly fresh mother lode of the genuine article.

The only real comparisons to *Shadow Book's* treasure trove of bizarre stories, full of humour, horror, suspense, magic and mystery, are Japan's *Kwaidan*, the *Thousand and One Nights*, and most certainly Pu Sung-ling's *Liao Chai Chih I* (*Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, first translated for western appreciation by Herbert Giles in 1908).

Ji Yun (1724-1805) was an influential Qing dynasty scholar and philosopher. Unlike Pu Sung-ling, of whom too little is known, Ji Yun was well-known and described by many of his contemporaries.

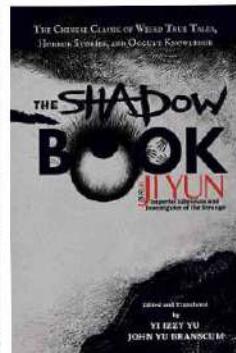
Emerging from a humble childhood in Hebei province, he showed great promise; the editors describe how, by the age of four, he was known for his erudition, adult conversation skills and improvised rhymes, a sardonic wit and “an uncanny ability to see in the dark as if it were day”.

His early life was a succession of accolades for literary achieve-

ments, and he became one of the leading figures in the scholarly resistance to “the Qing dynasty’s anti-supernaturalism”.

At the peak of his career, in 1768, a political indiscretion led to his banishment to a distant province to work as a rural clerk among farmers, merchants, soldiers and frontiersmen. There, Ji Yun was profoundly affected by the suffering and poverty of ordinary folk and developed “a growing disgust at the moral and intellectual hypocrisy of the Confucian scholars”. More significantly, he became fascinated by the daily tales of “supernatural” and unusual experiences, told to him by those countryfolk, many of which, he was personally assured, had actually happened.

Three years later Ji Yun was



called back by his emperor and appointed Imperial Librarian. He had editorial oversight of the unification of the vast imperial collection – a task that took over 4,000 scholars almost two decades. As the editors explain, this gave him much intellectual joy, because it gave him unique access to “China’s entire literary history”.

The genre included personal accounts of paranormal phenomena, fables and urban legends

On the downside, he was ordered “to savagely edit or destroy” books that were “politically problematic or intellectually heretical”. Ji Yun’s clever solution to this dilemma was to comply, but preserve references and details of the “lost” works in his private writings.

Ji Yun’s secret rebellion began in 1789 with the first volume of *Personal Accounts and Records of Others*. Four more followed featuring over 1,200 stories from which Yu and Branscum have selected 70 “Strange Nonfictions” and 13 supernaturally flavoured “Fables and Philosophies”.

Laid before us is a truly fortean feast in which Ji Yun is credited with “revolutionising Chinese horror and creative non-fiction [and] revitalising Chinese occult philosophy”. Many ingredients, such as lustful fox spirits, roof-walking vampires and sinister occult societies, are still popular today. There is much more: haunted cities jostle with cannibalistic villages; vengeful animals (including a yeti), amistic spirits and deceased souls wreak havoc; objects magically transform or take on a life not their own; an exploding aphrodisiac and a sentient fog; prophetic dreams and tragic fates; the ubiquity of Tibetan black magicians and mystical Taoist sages; and even “a vibrant sex trade of the reanimated dead”.

Our editors, with some justification, describe Ji Yun as a char-

ismatic blend of HP Lovecraft, Benjamin Franklin, Kafka and the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi (Chuang Tsu), presenting as a Confucian rationalist by day and a Daoist “paranormal investigator” by night.

The stories fall into a venerable genre called *zhiguai* – a contraction of the characters for “true weird tales” or “shadow histories” – that evolved over 2,000 years from Daoist and Buddhist “parables” used to illustrate metaphysical concepts.

Both editors are professors at US universities and had grown up reading Ji Yun in classical Chinese and they decided that the world deserved a translation. They have taken great care to preserve Ji Yun’s unique and elegant prose style. In addition to essential biographical and chronological information, they supply short explanations to some stories to expand their cultural context.

The *zhiguai* genre included personal accounts of paranormal phenomena, fables and urban legends alongside “debunking” stories and think-pieces on related topics. Typically they are short, and being light on “evidence” and heavy on “exaggeration” were collectively regarded as supporting the popular mythology and superstition, thus earning the scorn of the Confucian elite.

What makes this collection extraordinary is the way Ji Yun sets his narratives into a thoughtful context without any mockery, gently personalising them without detracting from the tales’ intrinsic value. This anthology is an intellectual treasure and simply a delight to read. I am sure Fort would have enthusiastically appreciated it.



The joy of books

Jay Vickers on a colourful cornucopia of literary delights

The Madman's Library

The Strangest Books, Manuscripts and other Literary Curiosities from History

Edward Brooke-Hitching

Simon & Schuster 2020

Hb, 255pp, £25, ISBN 9781471166914

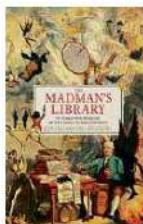
The Madman's Library is a cabinet of curiosities, a joyful gallimaufry. Dip into at any point, for a page or a chapter; in fact, reading it cover to cover is almost an overload. Beautifully illustrated on every page, this is a fascinating exploration of the weird and wonderful in books. To pick out a few highlights...

Binding books in human skin is called anthropodermic bibliopegy. The skin of William Burke (of cadaver suppliers Burke and Hare) made not only a pocketbook but a wallet for "the doorkeeper of an anatomical classroom in Edinburgh" – a fitting fate.

TS Eliot wrote that "the purpose of literature is to turn blood into ink". A number of books, particularly holy texts, have been written in blood. A Buddhist prince wrote a copy of the Nirvana Sutra in his own blood in AD 579, and Saddam Hussein commissioned a calligrapher to produce a Koran written entirely in his blood, donated over two years. The rock band Kiss had their blood mixed into the red ink used to print a Marvel comic about their own fictional adventures.

Daniel Defoe's 200 pseudonyms included Count Kidney Face and Sir Fopling Little-Tattle, while Jonathan Swift's included Countess of Fizzlerumpf and Andrew Tripe.

And then we have bestiaries, gloriously illustrated mediæval compendia of weird and wonderful creatures – the cryptozoology of their day.



Later, the 1607 *History of Four-Footed Beasts* claimed that "weasels give birth from their ears, lemmings graze in the clouds, elephants worship the Sun and Moon, and fall pregnant by chewing on mandrake". In the 17th century Sir Thomas Browne purged these "superstitions, myths and folklore... with relentless scientific rationale", and in so doing gave us 700 new words including amphibious, approximate, cadaverous, electricity, hallucination, ruminating and transgressive.

Dictionarys of slang are always fun; Francis Grose's 1785 *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* contained many sexual references removed from later editions as Britain went "from Georgian bawdiness to Victorian prissiness". "A Covent Garden nun" was of course a prostitute, and at the same time *Harris's List of Covent-Garden Ladies* was a detailed directory of their specialities.

Did you know that mediæval magical grimoires had to be written on virgin parchment, made from animals not yet sexually developed, or even on "unborn" parchment made from the amniotic sac?

Or that books supposedly written by the spirits of Shakespeare or Dickens must be catalogued under those names, not under the name of the medium who "received" them? (The author notes that "their skills invariably prove to have rusted somewhat post mortem".)

Or that the cells of organisms, seen under a microscope, were called by that Robert Hooke (of the famous flea drawing in *Micrographia* (1665) because they were reminiscent of the bare cells of monks?

A sheer delight.



The Light Ages

A Mediæval Journey of Discovery

Seb Falk

Penguin 2021

Pb, 416pp, £10.99, ISBN 9780141989679

The myth of the "darkness of the Middle Ages" descending after the fall of Rome is dispelled in *The Light Ages*.

Here historian, science historian and broadcaster Seb Falk demonstrates that "mediæval science" is no contradiction in terms, while religion and science weren't antagonists in the mediæval world.

Falk illustrates this through a fascinating biography of John Westwyk, a 13th-century Benedictine monk based at St Albans Abbey who wrote important treatises on astronomy, accidentally rediscovered in the 1950s.

The astrolabe was a flattened, portable model of the Solar System made from brass discs slotted on top of each other, through which you could measure the "ascensions" of moving celestial bodies.

Functioning regardless of whether the Universe was geocentric or heliocentric, astrolabes calculated the number of daylight hours in each day, reckoned the dates of Easter, predicted when the heavens were moving into zodiacal "houses" whose influence might affect us and forewarned of planting seasons heralded by the appearance of certain stars visible just before dawn. Such calculations may have been a form of meditation for monks. Physicians' astrolabes chose auspicious times to administer bleedings.

Previous inmates at St Albans had produced new discs to add to the astrolabe "for all altitudes". Westwyk added a guide to these, demystifying earlier manuals and correcting their errors.

Astrolabes dominate *The Light Ages*, and while the astrolabe was a "simplified" instrument compared to its predecessors, after a 39-page digression on them I was struggling with the azimuth and the obliquity of the elliptic.

This was an exciting time for astronomy. A standardised 24-hour day with 60-minute hours was proliferating, along with clocks. The long transition

to Arabic numerals was apace. There was a flood of philosophical works emerging in Arabic, Greek and Hebrew – pagan sciences could now become "the handmaiden of religion".

My favourite section of *The Light Ages* describes the rise of the universities. In 1336 the pope called on monastic orders to send one in 20 monks to university. Today's Worcester College, Oxford, began life as a Benedictine institution. As a graduate returning to the monastery, Westwyk's privileges included being excused midday Mass.

The new universities were particularly awestruck by the recent rediscovery of Aristotle; his works quickly dominated the curriculum. Periodic ecclesiastical bans on the study of Aristotle were largely ignored.

Around 1370 Westwyk left for the bleak cliff-top subsidiary monastery at Tynemouth, taking with him some astronomy works to copy. Tynemouth was three degrees further north than Classical philosophers had ever been, so Westwyk wrote a treatise with instructions on engraving an astrolabe dial for "ascensions" at a new latitude, 55 degrees North.

Like many clerics, Westwyk joined the debacle that was the 1382 Despenser's Crusade – fighting not in the Holy Land, but in Belgium. Led by an incompetent warrior bishop of Norwich, the crusaders – outnumbered by Franco-Flemish forces loyal to anti-pope Clement – fought with extraordinary courage, the clerics in particular. They withdrew to England in disgrace within six months. Westwyk kept his head down for the next decade.

He next pops up at London's Benedictine inn, where he wrote a manual – in English, daring and innovative at the time – with instructions for building an enormous astrolabe six feet in diameter. This manual, *Equatorie*, is a computer and equation solver. Its 140 pages of tables allow the user to calculate the motion of the planets back to the birth of Christ and to any point in the future, adjusting for leap years, aided by charts for roots and "sexagesimal ninths".

Nothing equalled the *Equatorie* until the first printed astronomy textbooks appeared nearly a century later.

Matt Salbury





The Starseed Signals

A RAW Perspective on Timothy Leary

Robert Anton Wilson

Hilarion Press 2020

Pb, 504pp, £17.99, ISBN 9781952746079

Robert Anton Wilson's *The Starseed Signals* is primarily a study of the famed counterculture figure, specifically Timothy Leary's hypothesised "eight circuit model of consciousness". Yet the book also touches on various other RAW hallmarks: agnosticism, life extension, space travel, politics, culture and consciousness studies.

Leary's eight circuit model is somewhat complex, and Wilson elucidates it in a manner that is arguably more accessible than in his New Age guidebook *Prometheus Rising* (1983). Put simply, the first four circuits address terrestrial existence, while the last four concern human existence in outer space, together with an exploration of various states of altered consciousness, including, but not limited to, psychic powers, mysticism, psychedelia and enlightenment. Each model follows the other as an advancement from an animalistic, primitive, "robotic" consciousness to that of complete transcendence, a "quantum consciousness" in Leary's description, either naturally or chemically induced, that very few are ever able to achieve.

The Starseed Signals, however, is not limited to an explication of Leary's eight circuit model. Written in 1974, and published for the first time, it represents one of Wilson's earliest texts, composed prior to his numerous fictional trilogies, which arguably present a more refined approach to similar subject matter. In fact, Wilson is here equally inspired by US President Richard M Nixon's 1971-72 political attacks on Leary, whom Nixon called "the most dangerous man in America". Explored in detail is Wilson's relationship with Leary during this politically charged era. This quasi-journalistic approach makes this one of his most intimate works, and therefore something of a curiosity in his œuvre. As such, it has an immediacy and energy missing from his somewhat

similar *The New Inquisition* (1986), which addresses more generally attacks upon those theories that fail to adhere to the "Fundamental Materialism" of the scientific Establishment. Indeed, one of the many strengths of *The Starseed Signals* is its firsthand account of the political and social disorder out of which Wilson developed his audaciously nonconformist body of work, an accurate summary of which might be a question he poses: "What is the precise difference between government and criminal conspiracy?" As one progresses from the lowest to the highest rungs of Leary's eight circuits, Wilson argues, the false gods and criminal whims of the Establishment are exposed, leaving one better equipped to recognise the existence of the incorporeal and to find the God within.

Entertaining, accessible, thought-provoking – if somewhat dated – *The Starseed Signals* should prove equally satisfying for RAW devotees and acolytes alike.

Eric Hoffman



Islam, Science Fiction and Extraterrestrial Life

The Culture of Astrobiology in the Muslim World

Jörg Matthes Detemann

IB Tauris 2020

Hb, 269pp, £85, ISBN 9780755601271

This book's multi-lingual bibliography is 40 pages long and its foregoing text has opened up wide horizons in several senses, as it ranges from Morocco to Indonesia and explores such topics as proto science and proto science fiction in the Koran and the *Arabian Nights*, the possibility of Muslim aliens on other planets, Third World films that have taken their lead from *Star Trek* or the *Star Wars* films, Muslim astrophysicists, the influence of Erich von Däniken in the Middle East, the enthusiasm of the Syrian Assad regime for science fiction and a great deal else besides. The reader is confronted by a pell-mell mix of genuine scientific enterprises and ludicrously pious fantasies.

In the Koran Allah is described as *rab al-alimin*, "Lord of the

worlds" and this has been understood by some to be a reference to life on other planets, as has another verse, "And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the living creatures that he has scattered through them".

But the plurality of worlds presents special challenges to Muslims. How was the *hajj* to be performed by the inhabitants of distant galaxies? And how were the hours of prayer to be observed? A Syrian artist has described the Koran as "the first work of SF". On the other hand, Pakistani and Saudi authorities have denounced the SF genre, and have found its tendency to promote the Darwinian doctrine of evolution particularly offensive. On a more positive note, it is good to know that Pakistani religious experts have ruled that a Pakistani woman may marry an alien as long as he too is a Muslim.

Christian imagery and concepts have underpinned quite a few western SF masterpieces, including CS Lewis's *Perelandra* sequence, James Blish's *A Case of Conscience* and Walter M Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. On Dettermann's showing, Muslim SF is less impressive, though disarmingly prudish. For example in Ahmed Raef's *The Fifth Dimension* (1972) Mars is run on the lines of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Martians swim in their normal clothes, thus avoiding nudity. In an Iranian film *Tehrān 2121*, a female robot wears a headscarf and is told to extend her mechanical shielding to cover more of her metal legs. There can be a political edge to Muslim astrobiology. Why it that alien flying saucers always seem to land in the US? Should not the United Arab Emirates or Malaysia get a look in? Could aliens solve the Arab-Israel conflict? Kemal Ataturk has been seen as the heir to the wisdom of the lost continent of Mu. The colonial encounter can be presented as an alien invasion or vice-versa. And so on.

I love weird books and so I loved this one, but I could have done with a bit more of an analytic overview.

Robert Irwin



Secret Britain

Unearthing Our Mysterious Past

Mary-Ann Ochota

Frances Lincoln Publishing 2020

Hb, 240pp, £20, ISBN 9780711253469

With a certain irony, archaeology is a very fast moving subject. The guides that are so iconic from our childhoods are long out of date, which is why there will always be a place for books like *Secret Britain*, which covers 75 of the most iconic archaeological discoveries found in Scotland, Wales, and England.

Starting in Orkney with the Westray Wifey, Mary-Ann Ochota leads us on a circular journey around the archaeology of Britain, before finishing at Callanish on the Isle of Lewis.

The photography is exquisite. Whether showing specific artefacts like the Dagenham Idol, or landscape features such as the Uffington White Horse, the images are clear and capture what is often so evocative about these objects and places. I was also impressed with the chronological spread of archaeology included. Often such overviews focus on prehistoric archaeology (because it has that unknowable earth mysteries quality). Here you will find a far broader range, with the Lullingstone Roman Villa, Guildhall Witch Bottle and the Royston Cave alongside places such as Star Carr and Grimes Graves.

Secret Britain is very much an introduction to these sites, locations and artefacts, aimed at a general readership. If you have a familiarity with the broader archaeology of Britain you might find the discussions a little brief. Some of the locations such as Avebury in Wiltshire and Maiden Castle in Dorset deserved a bit more than a paragraph. However, I was happy to see Silbury Hill get plenty of discussion and I commend the author for giving space to less well known archaeological sites.

While this will probably appeal to the more knowledgeable as a beautiful collection of images it's a solid entry-level exploration and could form the basis for a great tour around some of the beautiful sites Scotland, England and Wales have to offer.

Steve Toase



An eclectic new religion

A new edition of this classic scholarly work updates the story of the history of Wicca, says **Paula Dempsey**

The Triumph of the Moon

A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft (2nd edn)

Ronald Hutton

Oxford University Press 2021

Pb, 544pp, £14.99, ISBN 9780198870371

Twenty years after its first edition, Ronald Hutton's history of Wicca has been thoroughly revised. He incorporates material produced in that interval and signposts readers to relevant scholarship.

I've heard Hutton say that Wicca is the only religion that Britain has given to the world. As evidence, he presents a particular set of influences which, taken together, seem bound to have made something happen.

Wicca is both the product and the antithesis of industrialisation. Its roots lie in the urbanisation of the British population in the 19th century from which developed a romantic view of rural life. German romanticism and the classical world influenced late 19th-century thought; Pan appeared in poetry symbolising the wild in nature and in humans.

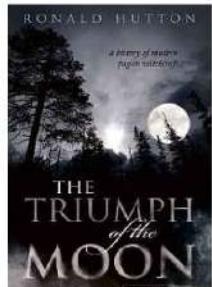
Writers including Jane Harrison, Robert Graves and Margaret Murray provided historical underpinnings. Witchcraft was ancient practised in secret throughout the Christian era. Women and men were equal, each coven being governed by a priest and priestess. The god of the witches died and was reborn each year, bringing fertility to the land. Women were celebrated but categorised by their fertility as Maiden, Mother or Crone, classifications which today are problematic for witches who question why they are defined solely by their ability to reproduce. But witchcraft was a fertility religion, and this was how it had been for hundreds of years. Except it hadn't.

Murray's claim of evidence that a witch cult had existed,

and that the Old Religion was still practised, was later discredited. Harrison and Graves relied more on romanticism and imagination than on hard evidence.

Wicca also incorporated the tradition of cunning men and women who provided herbal cures, found lost objects and removed curses. These people were Christians and frequently incorporated Christian terminology into their charms. Adding them to the foundation myth produced the story of people who did good, stayed under the radar, suffered persecution when discovered but kept true to their faith and endured.

Which brings us to the founder of modern witchcraft, Gerald Gardner, who took all these ingredients, added ritual elements from Freemasonry and some of Crowley's writings and set up a coven in the New Forest. One



of his high priestesses, Doreen Valiente, later rewrote these rituals in a beautifully poetic style including perhaps the best-known piece, The Charge of the Goddess.

The repeal of the Witchcraft Act allowed Wicca to be open and to seek initiates. By the 1960s, the self-styled King of the Witches Alex Sanders was presenting witchcraft rituals to a paying public in theatres, along with his pretty young priestess Maxine. The media were both horrified and intrigued. Witchcraft provided plenty of tabloid fodder.

By the late 1960s, Wicca

had crossed the Atlantic. This brought about considerable change. The British variety of witchcraft was polarised – man/woman, priest/priestess – and it was about fertility of the land and of its people. American witches such as Starhawk and Zusanna Budapest challenged this, creating a goddess-centred spirituality that became known as Dianic Wicca with women-only covens. At the same time there was a shift to the political left. Wicca was a conservative religion, despite its ritual nudity and worship of the old god. Its rituals ensured that things stayed as they were. The American version introduced an environmental awareness that hadn't existed before. The Earth is our mother. It's not enough to appreciate what we have, we must do better. We must celebrate women and women's values. Witchcraft became politicised and it became feminist.

Recent scholarship in the history of Wicca has produced revisions; many British witches don't believe in an ancestral link to the European witch hunts, for example. The gods and goddesses may be psychological archetypes to work with rather than living entities. Where Wicca led, other neo-Pagan religions have followed. At any Pagan event one will encounter Druids, heathens and chaos magicians as well as witches.

Wicca offered the opportunity to record a religion that had emerged within living memory, to gather oral history from people who had attended Gardner's coven and to track the ideas and circumstances that reached critical mass and produced something of great value to its adherents. It is to the credit of Wicca that it continues to thrive as it nears its first century. And it is to the credit of Ronald Hutton that he has documented its history so clearly and recognises its spiritual value to so many people.

★★★★★

Murder Houses of Edinburgh

Jan Bondeson

Matador True Crime 2020

Pb, 432pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781800460676

Thanks to Arthur Conan Doyle's medical studies at university in the 1860s, Edinburgh bequeathed us our greatest literary sleuth.

Sherlock Holmes's creator was intimate with the city mapped out here – and all the darkness and despair contained within the highest and lowest of abodes.

Jan Bondeson, who has previously made an equivalent survey of London, begins at Edinburgh's grandest murder

house, Holyrood Palace, where Mary Queen of Scots' Italian valet David Rizzo was stabbed in front of her in 1566 by noblemen who claimed he was an enemy spy but really had designs on the throne. Bondeson tracks the growth of the city from the Royal Mile through the expansion that rendered the surrounding slum tenements a teeming pit of depravity and death exploited by Burke and Hare to make a killing out of killing.

Madness here was rife and husbands routinely battered their wives to death for the pennies to buy more whisky. In the more salubrious squares of south Edinburgh, ambitious but lazy scions just as regularly destroyed their own families to try and cop a quick inheritance – scenarios Holmes would be only too familiar with.

There is only one case here he might make a two pipe problem from – that of John Donald Merrett, who murdered his mother, forged enough money to hire eminent pathologist Bernard Spilsbury to prove he didn't and went on to reinvent himself as dashing Navy officer Ronald Chesney – before coming to such a bad end that his severed arms are a permanent exhibit in Scotland Yard's Black Museum.

But, as the routine patterns of pitiless brutality for pitiful gain go on repeating themselves, you may also find yourself reaching for the morphine.

Cathi Unsworth

★★★★★

THE HAUNTED GENERATION

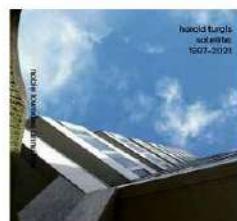
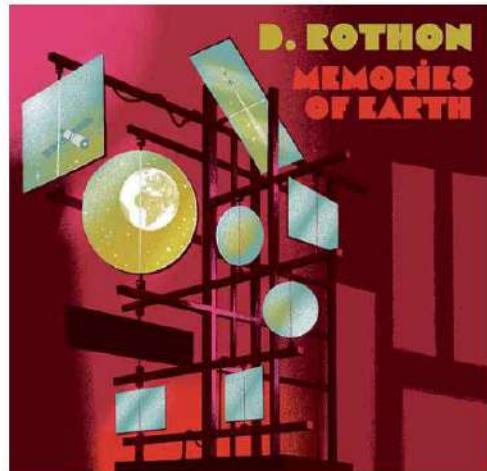
BOB FISCHER ROUNDS UP THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE PARALLEL WORLDS OF POPULAR HAUNTOLOGY...

"I think a kind of localised mass hysteria might have occurred," says Drew Mulholland. "The original reports were more to do with strange sounds, but they quickly became visual phenomena, too".

He's talking about the rash of UFO sightings that unsettled the Wiltshire town of Warminster in the mid-1960s and provides the inspiration for his splendidly disquieting new album *The Warminster UFO Club*. It's the culmination of an interest that began with his own fuzzy childhood memories of the resulting media coverage. "I remember jittery television images of soldiers using metal detectors on what looked like bleak moorland," he recalls.

The album combines Drew's epic 1999 composition 'Warminster', a collaboration with Portishead guitarist Adrian Utley, with a raft of atmospheric new pieces, all the result of his typically eccentric sound manipulations. "There's always some sort of Heath Robinson malarkey," he says. "How about the 62-foot tape loop that ran the length of our hall? Or recording the sounds that come down our chimney in the small hours?"

The album is available from castlesinspace.com, a label that has thrown itself into traditional forteana recently. Also available is *Black Water*, an album of immersive Radiophonic Workshop-style compositions fuelled by Scottish producer RJ McConnell's fascination with the Loch Ness Monster. Recording as Everyday Dust, he aims to put the fear back into his subject. "I've never warmed to the cute or endearing portrayal of the monster," insists RJ. "'Nessie' sounds like the name of a puppy. I wanted to bring back some of that sense of dread: the trepidation of the open black water and sense of the unknown. *Black Water* is my soundtrack to a non-existent TV film, and in my mind it's out there on a grainy VHS tape from the late Eighties in somebody's attic..."



Similarly out in the sticks: North Yorkshire-based Marcus H, aka Soiled. His new album *Blistered and Patched* is a gloriously spooky hotch-potch of jagged guitars and sound collage that reeks of the windswept moors... as well as the haunted radio that once tormented his sister on a family holiday in Devon. It's available from wormholeworld.bandcamp.com. Mired in a more concrete wilderness is Harold Turgis, whose album *Satellite: 1997-2001* comprises two suites of affecting dystopian synth compositions; a love letter to the "unfinished ring roads, closed shopping centres and railway depots" of Croydon. As well as the innocent optimism of "office blocks related to the space age – Apollo House, for example." Head to haroldturgis.bandcamp.com.

Also pining for the golden age of cosmic ambition is multi-instrumentalist D Rothon, whose second album for the superlative Clay Pipe label is a delightful evocation of the late 1960s space race. As he recalls: "Being taken to see 2001: A Space Odyssey, trips to the London Planetarium, the Moon landings... there was a sense that we were living on the cusp of an exciting futuristic world"; although the album, *Memories of Earth*, is equally infused with melancholy as Rothon uses his trademark pedal steel guitar to explore the "sense of disconnection one might feel millions of miles from home." It's available from claypipemusic.com.

Other nuggets: Kemper Norton has released *Trollia*, a beautiful collection of folktinged drones inspired by "Cor-

nish dances, Scottish children's songs and other community events". It's soothing enough to provide closure for anyone still scarred by memories of the dreaded "country dancing" at school, and available from kempernorton.bandcamp.com. *The Family* is a new collection from Scottish producer Alan Sinclair – in his guise as Repeated Viewing – and is a pounding, John Carpenter-style imagined soundtrack to a tale of "biker gang raids, odd rituals and a bit of romance". Visit spunoutof-control.bandcamp.com. And feeling similarly cinematic is LA-based Klaus Morlock – aka The Unseen – whose album *The Goatman* is a glorious spoof Giacco soundtrack, dripping with the delicious sleaze of funky 1970s horror. Head to library-oftheoccult.bandcamp.com.

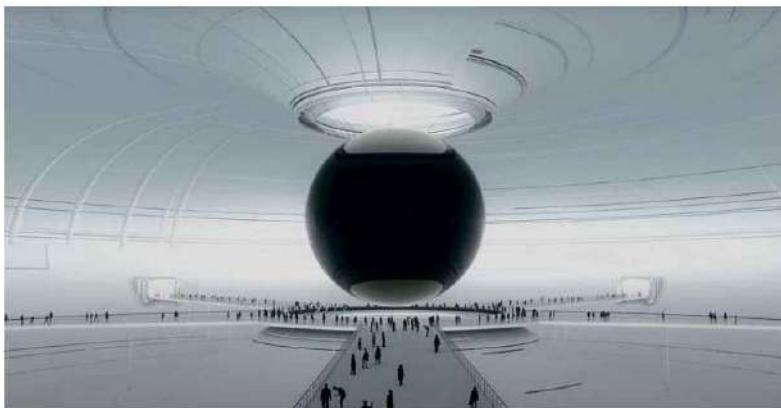
And for those with languid summer afternoons to fill: a superb 12-part podcast from musician Sharron Kraus. *Preternatural Investigations* examines "things that are strange but not too strange" and takes a decidedly fortean approach to an eclectic range of topics, skilfully investigating the means by which avowed rationalists – including herself – can find magic in the inexplicable. Backed by her own dream-like compositions, she takes an approach that is both charmingly personal and wryly funny. "One of my earliest memories is playing with a toy telephone, and using it to have conversations with fairies," she recalls in Episode 1, and later instalments look at the diminishing nature of childhood wonder and the depiction of magic in classic fiction. Put the fairies on hold, and visit preternatural-investigations.org.

Visit the Haunted Generation website at www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk, send details of new releases, or memories of the original "haunted" era to hauntedgeneration@gmail.com, or find me on Twitter... @bob_fischer

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Counterfeit worlds

What starts off as an exploration of the idea that we may all be living in a vast computer simulation ends up becoming a disturbing portrait of mental instability



A Glitch in the Matrix

Dir Rodney Ascher, US 2021
Dogwoof, DVD £15.99, Blu-ray £19.99

Is this world that (we think) we're living in actually a simulation in some vast computer somewhere? It's not a new idea, of course; you could say that the shadows in Plato's cave were an early thought experiment along the same lines, as is mentioned in this somewhat odd documentary.

A Glitch in the Matrix begins with director Rodney Ascher (*Room 237*) commenting that we have viewed the brain (and/or consciousness) working, by analogy, over the years as a series of aqueducts, then as a telegraph, then a computer; the idea of our consciousness being a simulation, then, is just the latest analogy. Not so, says Swedish philosopher and AI specialist Nick Bostrom, who has famously written academic papers on our living in a simulation; not so, also, says a handful of true-believers.

There are a lot of talking heads in this film, via Zoom interviews – some, such as Bostrom, *TechGnosis* author Erik Davis and artist and historian Emily Pothast,

"When I pulled the trigger, it messed me up really bad..."

appearing as themselves, while the true-believers are portrayed by CGI comic book/SF/alien/robot avatars. It's a clever gimmick, but it doesn't really add anything: a talking head is still just a talking head however it's dressed up – and there are a lot of them.

Predictably, the documentary focuses on Philip K Dick, with numerous clips from a talk he gave at an SF con in France in 1977. True, many of PKD's novels question the reality we live in – but there's no mention of Daniel F Galouye's *Counterfeit World* (1964), the classic novel about discovering that we live in a computer simulation as a market research exercise – and compare the same idea in Frederik Pohl's short story "Tunnel under the World" (1955), albeit mechanical rather than virtual. The classic film, of course, central to this documentary, is *The Matrix* (1999).

Bostrom says his theory "does

not assume that all the details of our world would be simulated to perfect subatomic precision all the time... If you have infinitely fast computers, sure... But you would be able to create a simulation capturing only enough that to the simulated creatures, they couldn't tell the difference... to leave more detail in a particular part of reality when we are paying attention, but then, not simulating all of those details all the time."

Those arguing for our living (or existing) in a simulation come up with a lot of dodgy logic, poor reasoning and reliance on inner, subjective experience. There's a lot of equating our "lives" with being characters in games, and with the difference between real players and stock characters supplied by the game; one true-believer says: "I am a real-life non-playing character." Another suggests that "since no one was watching, the program would stop working" – an echo of Bishop Berkeley's tree-in-the-forest idea.

Erik Davis says: "People seem particularly drawn into their own sort of solipsistic world... We go into solipsism, we go into psychosis, we go into paranoia."

And so, a long way into the

film, we're in the realm of mental illness, of serious psychosis, of believing that no one, including yourself, is real. One person comments on "an inability to separate the real world from digital realities", citing the 2013 New Zealand shooter who live-streamed his killings. "You get into a place where you treat reality like those are digital, disposable bodies." Another had watched *The Matrix* hundreds of times – obsessive behaviour. "Maybe there's something with this *Matrix* thing. Maybe it's real. Maybe it's not so fake after all, you know; who knows?"

The most tragic outcome of this is that one of the talking-head avatars, Joshua Cooke, is telling his story from prison. In 2003, the 19-year-old Cooke, having watched *The Matrix* yet again, went down to the basement of his house and shot his adoptive parents dead. Although Cooke didn't use it himself in court, this led to "the Matrix defence" of the perpetrator being unable to distinguish between reality and the digital world; Cooke believed he was living in the virtual reality of *The Matrix*. "When I pulled the trigger," he says, "it messed me up really bad because it wasn't anything like I had seen on *The Matrix*. Real life was so much more horrific."

The end comments in the film sum up the problem. "I never want to get locked into the idea that this is all fake if in fact the reason I thought it was fake is because it was an easier way for me to deal with the complexity of human existence." Emily Pothast adds: "I think loneliness and isolation and trauma play very heavily in the kinds of realities that people construct for themselves."

In some ways *A Glitch in the Matrix* is quite a clever film; in other ways it's a bit of a mess. It's too long and too repetitive and doesn't really put forward any consistent argument. There



TELEVISION

IT'S very own couch potato, STU NEVILLE, casts an eye over the small screen's current fortean offerings



MonsterQuest

History Channel / Amazon Prime

The portentous music and narration strike up – it's historical context setting time! These are, of course, pretty much interchangeable between one paranormal TV series and another. Sepia pics of chaps with sideboards; minor key tinkly music and underlying hum; a line drawing of an astonished, musket-wielding man in a Davy Crockett hat: "In 1728, Obadiah Drivel was out stalking loganberries on the shore, and said he saw a great snake plunge into the icy waters / a wild man, 11 feet tall / a bright light in the sky..." *MonsterQuest* doesn't disappoint in this respect. In its very first episode it plunges icily into Lake Champlain, on the hunt for Champ.

The brief history lesson over, the programme homes straight in on Champ Exhibit A, the Sandra Mansi photo from 1977, showing a blurry grey thing sticking out of blurry blue water. You just know we'll hear more of this later, but first some anecdotal evidence, such as that provided by the splendidly monikered BJ Bombard. Looking not unlike the late Charles Napier, Bombard stands at the wheel of his boat with the sunlight glinting off the lake, his teeth and his epaulettes as he recounts his encounter,

The photo shows a blurry grey thing sticking out of blurry blue water

employing the audio-visual tautology beloved of this sort of series, in which action is matched to narration: "I got my binoculars out," he recalls, getting his binoculars out and looking through them, "...and looked at the object."

A deal of theorising follows, much of it based on the thing's resemblance to a plesiosaur. The fact that plesiosaurs were (as far as anyone can tell) incapable of walking on land or holding their heads up for any length of time is no obstacle, as in the last 65 million years they could have evolved stronger fins, and spines, and necks, and quite possibly hats and dark glasses to evade detection.

To provide some semblance of balance, Benjamin Radford (of *Skeptical Enquirer* fame) sidles on and wastes little time telling us it's a log, complete with a natty bit of computer modelling showing how a certain-shaped log would look like the Mansi pic. In fairness, it does steer clear of the more specious

Nessie-type explanations (circus elephants out for an early morning dip, carp swimming in formation), but the narration moves at a fairly swift clip back to the general tone of: "Yeah, might be a log, but it might be CHAMP!!"

"A crocodile shaped like a seal with a long neck" – as opposed to a seal shaped like a crocodile with a long neck – announces redoubtable cryptozoologist and Nick Nolte lookalike Scott Mardis. He meets Sandra Mansi in one of those fabulously awkward staged "approach-hello-handshake" shots beloved of cosy programmes, and they chat amiably on a lakeside park bench.

What does shine through, though, as it does throughout the whole *MonsterQuest* series, is the undoubted sincerity of the witnesses. There are level-headed, bright people out there in all weathers, the year round, looking for answers; and *MonsterQuest* gives credit both to them and the audience for the ability to make up their own minds.

are too many talking heads, and none of them is identified after their first appearance – hence the non-attribution of some of the quotations above. And in the end, it's not about simulation at all; it's a disturbing portrait of mental instability, of how people who can't cope with reality find a persuasive and, for some, believable solace in virtual reality.

David V Barrett



Chasing Shadows: Britain's Big Cat Mystery

Dir Mike Coggan, UK 2021
Available on YouTube

Chasing Shadows is a longer revisiting of themes touched on in the 10-minute *Big Cats in Britain*, which director Mike

Coggan admits began life as a "TV pitch" by his Grizzly Productions, "a video and animation company. We produce mostly commercial content. On the side we go and shoot our own sort of projects."

It looks like a showreel at times. We're get shots of the crew filming each other and showing off their shiny production kit. Gorgeous panoramic shots of a forest seem to be there to show what their drone can do.

The substance of their investigations? There's detail on sightings by zoo people who know their big cats – two keepers at Exmoor Zoo who encountered pumas locally, and *We Bought a Zoo's* Benjamin Mee, who had a sighting while returning to his Dartmoor Zoo. He thought one of his pumas had escaped until he found them all accounted for. Mee describes the behaviour of local livestock

changing while big cats were loose – horses all gathered in the middle of their fields. He also notes sightings ceased after a particularly severe winter.

There's commendable scaling work on "black leopard" drone footage, the "leopard's" size calculated by measuring the known dimensions of the drone and the size of the shadow it would cast; based on this, the filmmakers feel the cat was "probably a domestic." Joel did FOIA requests to all National Parks; only North York Moors reported any big cat activity. There's a forensic look at footage of an alleged big cat kill of a Gloucestershire wild boar – from the US, puma expert Dr Mark Elbroch gives a detailed account of why he has suspicions. Although sceptical on British big cats, Elbroch admits that "people don't find dead pumas," as they choose sheltered places to die.

Dorset big cat expert McGowan talks us through his convincing photos of deer kills in the New Forest and a roadside "lion" corpse. Merrily Harpur's "daimon" theory gets the briefest of look-ins. Sir Benjamin Slade's account of a black leopard on his estate seems to be an excuse to film him handling guns from his extensive collection.

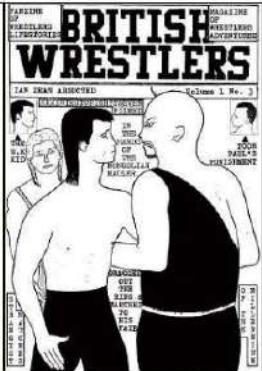
But extraordinary claims require less maddeningly vague treatment. Coggan, who's seen a British black leopard himself, concludes that most believers have had an encounter of their own but that "our search for big cats" is "fruitless". He adds that the subject is "nice to dip your toe in." If it's a quick toe-dip into a complex phenomenon you're after, then this is for you. Matt Salusbury



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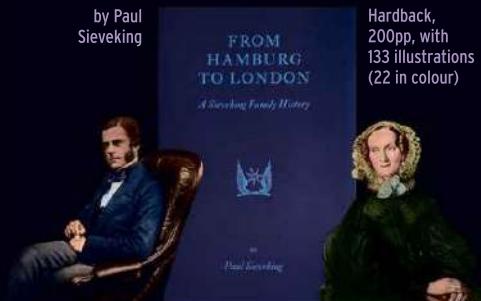
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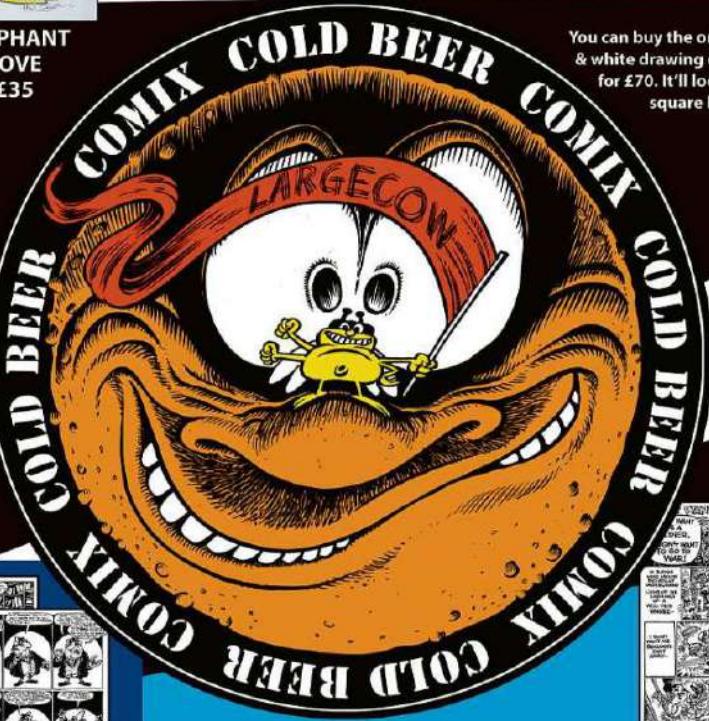


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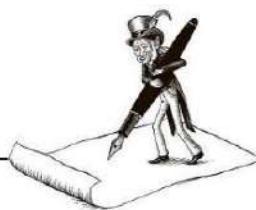


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Sky ships

Regarding the photographs of "sky ships" [FT405:11], the news reports mostly explained this phenomenon as a superior mirage (Fata Morgana) – but that was an error. The illusion here was of a "false horizon" where the ocean surface matches the colour of the background sky because of fog or a reflection. The boat appears not to be at the level of the perceived horizon. Note that with superior mirages the image would be distorted and parts would be inverted. These ships are very clearly not distorted. The news media, particularly the meteorologists, were quite wrong in perpetuating the fancy-sounding mirage terms in these examples when it's more simply a visual illusion. www. metabunk.org/threads/debunked-fata-morgana-or-mirage-hovering-boat-images-false-horizon.9112/

Sharon Hill
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Mortlake mistake

It's a shame that your "contemporary newspaper graphic" [FT405:57] showing the location of the 'Stripper' murders in Cathi Unsworth's article wasn't examined a little more closely by someone with a knowledge of the mystical centres of west London. The site where Gwyneth Rees's body was found is (more-or-less) correctly described in a panel as "a Mortlake ashpit". Unfortunately, the graphic points to a spot somewhere in Brentford. Mortlake is actually located where the word 'Barnes' appears on the map. I would have expected *Fortean Times* to be able to distinguish between the haunt of the Brentford Griffin and the site of Dr John Dee's alchemical laboratory!

John Rimmer
Magonia Review, London

Highland time slip

Recently I reread the book *Moidart and Morar* (1950) by the artist and famous political figure Wendy Wood, one of the founders and highly active member of the then National Party of Scotland. On page 95 in the chapter 'Kinlochmoidart to Glenugie', she

SIMULACRA CORNER



David Burn spotted this lake monster at Castle Ward, Co. Down, Northern Ireland.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous

forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to *Fortean Times*, PO Box 66598, London N11 9EN or to sieveking@forteantimes.com

mentions that when descending by foot from the pass to Glenugie: "Beside the first boundary wall at the head of the glen I saw a small house. I saw it then, and have seen it many times since, yet it is not really there! I do not know whether it is of the fashion of Things to Come, or of things so long past that no one to-day remembers them. When I mentioned it, I was told that there is a prophecy that some day there will be a stable for horses on that spot. Nothing is more unlikely; but we shall see, or perhaps we shan't." Does any reader know more about this?

Andreas Trottmann
St-Aubin, Switzerland

Paintings & portals

It was fascinating to read Dean Ballinger's exploration of Salvador Dalí's *La Gare de Perpignan* and Patrice Chaplin's writings on portals [FT404:56-57]. As I've

written before, Chaplin's auto-biographical books are all partly fictionalised, and her novels are all partly autobiographical – an interesting if confusing way to write, which prompts discussion on the nature of Reality and the distinction between Facts and Truth – a fortean topic indeed!

Patrice Chaplin contributed a story on Dalí's experience of the Perpignan station portal, "The Mountain Wind", to my SF/alternative history anthology *Tales from the Vatican Vaults* (Robinson 2015; see FT342:63). It places Dalí's experience in an historical context with accounts of similar experiences, including an 18th-century member of the Habsburg family seeking a portal on the peak of Mount Canigou; a 19th-century British missionary encountering a group of scientific investigators who claimed to have located a portal in the Pyrenees; the inevitable interest of Hitler, Himmler and Otto Rahn;

and culminating in Dalí's story and painting. How much of this comes from Chaplin's researches, and how much is the creation of her imagination, who can tell?

David V Barrett
London

Bayes and Means

Andrew May traces the roots of the phrase "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence" to a work published by the French mathematician Pierre Laplace in 1814 – and views it in the light of Bayesian inference [FT404:55]. The phrase could equally be traced back to David Hume who wrote: "In our reasonings concerning matter of fact, there are all imaginable degrees of assurance, from the highest certainty to the lowest species of moral evidence. A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence." Fortunately for mathematical dullards like myself, Hume's words from 1748 predate the work of Bayes and Laplace, so can be readily understood without knowledge of Bayesian statistics. When deciding how much belief to place in such fortean topics as Reiki-like healing therapy, dowsing for metals or extraterrestrial visitors, they continue to be an excellent rule of thumb.

Martin Stubbs
London

Pagan roots

I take issue with Jareth Kobek's letter [FT404:72] in response to Therese Taylor's article [FT400:48-51]. Does he seek to bamboozle us by bringing in the big guns of academia with his assertion that "almost all contemporary scholars" agree that folk traditions are "explicitly Christian practices"? What – all folk practices, all over the world? Surely no one can doubt that corn dollies on hayricks and holly, ivy and mistletoe at Christmas are directly related to pagan practices in this particular part of the world. Might I suggest that he reads Mary-Ann Ochota's new book, *Secret Britain*, for a fascinating tour of fantastica unearthed throughout Britain,

LETTERS

the origins of which are obscure, to appreciate the diversity of beliefs even in this small corner of the world? And shouldn't we be embracing diversity?

Rebecca Kavanagh
Worsley, Greater Manchester

Modern magic

Perhaps it's not generally realised that the draft in America since the Civil War has been by lottery. The Union Army was raised in part in this way (although those chosen could buy themselves out for \$300). In New York, this led to four days of rioting and more than 1,000 deaths. In 1940, Roosevelt declared the process "a solemn ritual" and gave it an atavistic makeover. The same bowl was used to take out numbered balls as had been used in 1917-18. The balls were stirred by a large wooden spoon, which had been fashioned especially for the occasion from one of the rafters in Philadelphia's Independence Hall, and when

Secretary of State Henry L Simpson put his hand to this bowl that had been stirred by the magic spoon, his eyes were covered by a strip of linen that had been cut from the covering of a chair used at the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In this way, 16 million men were called up. Nixon revived the ritual in 1969 during the Vietnam war.

Edward Young
London

Shrunken heads

I think Bevis Sale is off the mark in his letter about the shrunken heads in Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum [FT403:67]. While I sympathise with his disappointment that the heads are not available to view virtually, I doubt that "most people" would see them as "venerated objects". I suspect viewers are more likely to see them simply as rather morbid curiosities of a bygone age.

Gary Williams
Ledbury, Herefordshire

Merrill addendum

In the midst of all the revisions needed to bring my initially epic-length James Merrill article ("Voices from the Pageant" FT405:40-47) into "fit to print" shape, one salient point was inadvertently cut: namely, the significance of the peacock, as illustrated on the cover of Merrill's *Mirabell: Books of Number* and the photographs from Merrill and partner David Jackson's Stonington, Connecticut, apartment. In Merrill's poem, Mirabell, a fallen angel, and one of the irradiated Mothman-like creatures, gradually takes on the form of a peacock. Initially the angel self-applies the name Beezelbob, but, following Merrill and Jackson's protestations over the silliness of this name, is renamed by Merrill and Jackson "Mirabell" after the "strut and plumage" of the protagonist of William Congreve's *The Way of the World*; the name also has echoes of "Merrill" and "mirror". A piquant detail: Merrill

biographer Langdon Hammer points out that Royal Park in Athens, Greece, a park frequented by Merrill and Jackson and a place where homosexual men were known to cruise for sexual partners, was also populated by peacocks.

Eric Hoffman
Vernon, Connecticut

Lake of bones

On the day FT405 arrived (20 April), but before I read about the report on the lake of skeletons in the Himalayas [p.12], I watched a YouTube video on the subject (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYBPdL8cJf0>). The information in both is generally in agreement – but at 6.38 minutes in, it states: "In fact, it seems extremely unlikely that these people could have been soldiers at all, as there were many women and children amongst the dead, and only a single weapon was ever found at the site, an iron spearhead." This conflicts with the FT statement: "There were no children". In the end, the 15-minute video comes to no definite conclusion, although it speculates (without evidence) that some of the dead might have been victims of the Thuggee cult, which might explain the relative lack of man-made objects found in the lake.

Ian Rippey
By email

False memories

In the 1960s, Australia had a large influx of people from eastern and southern Europe. It was easy for these people to gain Australian citizenship after a few years of hard work; the citizenship extended to any children under 21 (the then age of majority) – and any children born in Australia automatically became citizens. In 1967 the Federal Government had a referendum so it could be decided if Aboriginal Australians could become citizens and not wards of the state.

I remember that I was surprised when I heard this, as this country was extending citizenship to people of European



Green Man

This Green Man is carved on a tree in Mud Lane, near Martinsell, Pewsey Vale, Wiltshire. Mud Lane connects the Martinsell car park with the road to Wootton Rivers and (as the name suggests) is very muddy in winter. There are areas of woodland along the route and this Green Man is halfway along the track. The other image is a figure hanging from a nearby tree.

Phil Harwood, Marlborough, Wiltshire



Bari's beasts

Sir, may I be the 94th to point out that Chris Josiffe appears to be seeing what he wishes to see when he describes Bari's 'leone' as having horns and being a 'Southern Italian Mothman' [FT403:76]. They are clearly the tails of the two beasts flanking the lion. One can see their front paws resting on the lion's haunches. The one on the left is the better preserved of the pair and one can also see that the tail is wrapped around the lion's front paw. The remains of the mane can also be seen on the lion, which we are looking at from above. A more intriguing question is what the two beasties are supposed to represent. My first thought was that they were the lion's cubs, but then I noticed the lack of rear limbs and the aforementioned left creature's tail being coiled around the lion's foreleg. Are they perhaps representative of daemons or biblical serpents, the bas-relief as a whole representing a biblical story?

Stuart Jenkins
By email

Christopher Josiffe responds:

A fair point! I wasn't being entirely serious in suggesting the bas relief offers evidence for a Pugliese Mothman (Falen'Uomo?), but this type of wry or off-the-cuff remark doesn't always translate well when appearing in print, as I should have learned by now. Nevertheless, while I agree that something serpentine is coiled around the claw or paw on the left-hand side, it also seems that



TOP: "Alexander's flight", a common Apulian motif.
ABOVE: A double-tailed siren on the wall of the Palazzo Baronale in Spinete.

the corresponding right-hand coil is being grasped by a hand – an additional appendage to the claw/paw on that side. It is also curious that the two beasties' tails disappear behind the main figure's head in such a way as to represent its horns, but that may simply be an artistic device employed by the designer/carver of the relief.

I think that the "mothman" is actually a very ruined double-tailed siren, a well-known motif in the Middle Ages. The mediæval double-tailed siren is widespread in Italy and beyond; it's one of the most common motifs, to be found in Apulia

– the mosaic of Otranto has a large number of sirens – or in any other place with a mediæval building, such as Modena. You can also find it on the Starbucks logo (which actually is *not* very well known in Italy).

At first I thought that the bas-relief was a depiction of "Alexander's flight", another widespread stylistic motif in Apulia, based on a legend regarding Alexander the Great, who tried to ascend to the heavens with a carriage pulled by two griffins, but failed as he went too close to the Sun. In Apulia, you can find bas-reliefs and mosaics depicting this, but many were destroyed after the Counter Reformation, as pagan legends were not welcome in holy places.

Anyway, after further examination, I don't think this bas-relief is one of them. Nor is it a central fountain with two birds or giraffes with tilted necks drinking its water – which was another interpretation that occurred to me. But I'm pretty sure it's a siren.

Mariano Rizzo, Bari, Italy

ethnicity (at the time there was a White Australia policy) who were new to Australia, but the indigenous people whose ancestors had lived here for at least 50,000 years were not even counted in the census! I can quite clearly remember voting 'Yes', as did a large majority of Australians (of European descent). But my memory is false, as at that time I was not yet 21, so I could not have voted. I think the false memory is because I wanted to vote Yes and because some years later the voting age was lowered to 18.

It was only recently that I realised my memory was false when

I watched a documentary and it mentioned the referendum and the date. It makes me wonder how many other memories of historical events are false – I am sure I can remember a visit by Queen Elizabeth and seeing on the TV news the Beatles on the balcony of the Adelaide Town Hall and the news that Donald Campbell had broken the land speed record on Lake Eyre (despite his arrival breaking a 20-year drought). I wonder how many other memories I have are the result of me wanting them to be true...

Margaret Pitcher
Canberra, Australia

Odd theft

I read with interest the review of Gareth E Rees's *Unofficial Britain* [FT404:62], and particularly noted the reference to "Hilton Park's space-age service station of 1967".

From mid-1968 through to 1972, as a sixth former and student, I used to work on Saturdays for *Bayliss News* in my hometown of Wolverhampton. In the mornings I would telephone stories written by our journalists to the Sunday newspapers, and in the afternoons I would accompany one of them to a football match, where I would telephone each part of his report

to the 'Saturday Pink' (of wherever the visiting team was from) while he watched the game and wrote his commentary.

One Saturday morning in the summer of probably 1969, Ron Warrilow (a senior journalist) rushed into the office with a grin on his face and asked if my colleague and I would like to accompany him on a 'live' story out on the M6. Of course we agreed, and next thing we knew we were heading north up the M6 past the vacant Hilton Park Service Station, which had not yet opened (it opened in 1970).

Continued on page 72

It Happened to Me...

Legend tripping

Alan Murdie's piece on 'Arthurian Legend Tripping' at Cadbury Castle [F401:18-21] reminded me of a visit a group of us made there in about 1978. As we entered, we got what I think is a fairly typical effect at Cadbury: a sense of a vortex of spiralling winds in the trees as we climbed to the inner camp. We spent several hours there, each wandering off and doing their own thing, being caught in something like personal reveries.

I found myself at a high point at one corner, above the upper rampart, and just stood, gazing into the distance, and musing or meditating on – possibly invoking – the Arthurian atmosphere. One friend found a long staff-like stick and took on a pantomime knight persona as he wandered, making appropriate gestures, round and round the ramparts below my vantage point. Another friend in the lower part of the summit, diagonally across from me, climbed a small tree – though because of the lie of the land, we weren't invisible. After a while, another of us came and sat to meditate about four yards behind me. I was half-aware of him, as I was of my knightly comrade, but no contact was made. By that time I was pretty deep and settled in whatever I was doing and I recall finding it hard to stir.

I must have stood stock still for a couple of hours, and when I finally shook myself out and turned round, my meditating friend jumped out of his skin. He swore that I hadn't been there when he sat down – but I could assure him I was; he decided I'd stepped half-out of this world and gone invisible. We wandered back across the site and the friend had just come from his tree, and asked us if we'd seen anything over where we'd come from, because while he'd been sitting he'd heard the sounds of horses and carts and calling, and children



"We all felt we'd been 'somewhere else' and a little otherworldly"

and things as if there was a market or something going on. We'd heard nothing of the sort, of course. We all drifted back together piecemeal, and related what we'd been doing – the 'knight' felt he'd been in a 'warrior' state of mind, and another declared she'd also taken up a steady position as a kind of 'guardian'. We all felt that we'd been 'somewhere else', and a little 'otherworldly'. No drugs were involved, unusually for us – I think we all looked like the kind of people liable to be given the once-over by the police.

Alan also refers to faces in the clouds. Fifteen years after the Cadbury visit, I climbed St Michael's Hill at Montacute in Somerset. It was a rainy

afternoon, I was alone on the hill, and I climbed to the top room of the tower. I was aware of the legend about a dream leading to a cross being found on the hill in the 11th century; the cross was put in a cart, the oxen started walking and didn't stop till they came to the site where Waltham Abbey now stands in Essex, by 'divine' found^{tion}. So the hill is a kind of 'hill of revelation'. I glanced out of one window – facing towards Cadbury, I realised afterwards – and a clear image of a man's face appeared in the clouds – jaw-length hair, bearded and like a picture-book face of a mediæval warrior, and gazing straight at me. I looked away, refocused my eyes, and looked back – 'he' was still there. There was no sort of revelatory message, no 'I see God!' kind of thing, but I made a mental acknowledgement of the vision, addressed to a goddess, before realising that the face and St Michael's Hill suggested some gender-inappropriateness. As soon as that thought came, the clouds

seemed to swirl and reform, and became a female face, again looking straight back at me. After a few minutes, the clouds became just clouds again. I was left feeling that something special had occurred, but what? – one of what I have come to know as 'meaningless meaningful experiences'. But Cadbury seemed implicit in it, and a link across the 15 years.

John Billingsley

Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire

Key returned

Re the "Nose pad windfall" or JOTT ("Just one of those things") [F396:70]: Some years back, we moved to an old twin Oast house in Kent. The house itself had a slightly odd atmosphere. My wife and I would often feel as if we were being watched. We witnessed several rather odd occurrences during the few years we lived there. One of these was particularly strange.

We had been in the house for about a year. I was paying a monthly direct debit for our electricity, but the energy company asked for an up-to-date meter reading. The meter was housed in a very robust wooden cabinet attached to the outside of the kitchen wall. I couldn't find the key to open it anywhere. We asked the landlord and the agents, but no one could help. After weeks of searching, I thought that I had better just prize the door open with a crowbar. I figured I'd get a new lock from the hardware shop. I had this in mind as I left the house that morning to go to work. I recall thinking about leaving the office a bit early to go to the hardware shop on my way home. As I walked up to my car (parked on the gravel drive), I found a very old and slightly rusty key on the ground right by the driver's door. There was no way this had been on our drive after all this time; we would have spotted it a few days after moving in – not after the best part of a year. It was a solid

iron key about two inches (5cm) long and surprisingly ornate for a simple metal cabinet key. Sure enough, it opened the cabinet. I took a picture of the key lying on the gravel with my iPhone, but the image has been lost over the years with phone upgrades.

Leigh Goodman

By email

London UFO

One evening in August 2008, I was waiting outside Angel Islington tube station in north London to meet some friends to go to a Chinese restaurant. One of my friends turned up and we were chatting when I noticed an orange glow on the horizon.

Excitedly, I shouted, "Is that a UFO?" and pointed. My friend just laughed and looked away, so he missed it. What I saw was an orange ovoid shape emerge from the clouds and drift over. Judging from the size, angle and speed it must have been really high up. And as it went directly above me, I thought I could see an icosahedral subsection slowly revolving underneath the main body. I remember excitedly thinking, "Wow, they really are up there!"

When the object had shot off out of sight, I looked down and realised that a young woman had also seen it. She said it looked like a plastic bag, and I said yes but it had been glowing. Then, smiling, she said, "I feel really weird now," and we parted company. My friend went off to meet the rest of the group while I waited for a straggler. His parting shot as he went off was that it had probably been a helicopter, but I knew he hadn't even looked up. After the last man turned up, we set off for the restaurant. On arrival I found that my friend had told everyone. He yelled: "Hey, didn't you just see a UFO?" "And in your infinite discretion you told everyone?" I coldly replied. I then had to do some face-saving about how anything seen in the sky that is hard to identify counts as a UFO; that it could have been a meteorite. That seemed to pacify the group who, I'm sure, wanted to carry on mocking me all evening – but I know what I saw.

That's the problem, really. When it happens to you, you're just too excited to get a camera



out, and that would make you miss the whole thing anyway. The friend and I exchanged some frosty emails, where I pointed out that he knew I was not the only observer, and that my fleeting acquaintance had meant "plastic bag" in shape, not that a plastic bag had blown over us. That would be ridiculous; the thing had not just been glowing, but moving with purpose. Also, I seem to remember a prow, and fins running around it to the back. I nearly filed a BUFORA report.

James Wright
Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

Haunted television sets

My sister died in 2019, quite suddenly and unexpectedly. Although she wasn't young, she was very fit and healthy. The day after she died I woke up to the sound of music. There was no one else in the house, so I spent a moment or two, half asleep wondering what I was hearing. When I got downstairs the TV was on. It's a fairly recent "Smart TV" and it gets radio channels. We never use this feature, but somehow it had tuned itself to a radio channel.

There was a song playing which I did not recognise. It stopped me in my tracks when I heard the words: "*In my heart I will go / On ships overseas / That I know now / No, they don't exist anymore / It's time to say goodbye.*" The song was called *Con Te Partirò* – "Time to say goodbye".

A year passed. Another death. She came from Wales and we always teased her about her accent. In truth, what her accent loaned to her voice was something charming, and quite musical. We had drifted apart. I'd send Facebook messages and ask if she was OK. She always replied that she was. She was fine. But she *wasn't* OK, and by the time I knew this, she was dead.

The morning following her death I was lying in bed and became dimly aware of music. I went downstairs and found the TV was on. Again, it had tuned itself to a radio channel. It was a Welsh radio channel and the DJs were speaking Welsh, but the song they were playing wasn't Welsh. It was "The Circle of Life" from Disney's *The Lion King*: "*It's the circle of life / And it moves us all / Through despair and hope / Through faith and love.*"

We still use the TV every day, but it hasn't done anything strange lately. It hasn't turned itself on, nor has it played any more random radio channels. I think that lots of people experience strange phenomena and they do so frequently. Most of it can be dismissed as coincidence or apophenia or pareidolia and most of it probably is one of these things. And after all, aren't we far too busy to look for patterns in randomness?

However, I think some of these things, the patterns that we see, are *not* happenstance, *not* illusion: if we are open to them, they are really

there and they do really have meaning. I think there is a life beyond this one and I believe that those we have lost and loved can send a message back across – an "I'm really, really OK now" message, if you like. No ghosts carrying their heads under their armpits. No tips on who will win the Grand National. It all has to be dismissible. There hasn't to be any proof. You just have to take your time and remain open to it all. And listen.

Graham Chalk
By email

Your article on telephone communication with the dead [FT405:30-35] reminded me of something that happened in October 2000. I was staying in my parents' home with the intention of travelling with them to see my sick grandmother in hospital the following day. I lived in London, they were in Cambridgeshire, and my grandmother's hospital was in Suffolk. My father took a phone call from the hospital, to be told that his mother had just died. It was at that point that the TV, which was switched off, suddenly flashed, rather like an old-style flashbulb, complete with white, causing my mother to comment, "She's saying goodbye". My father, an avowed sceptic, said that this must have been a build-up of static; but given that the (CRT) television had never done it before or since, and chose this precise moment – this strikes me as unlikely.

Bob Johns
Letchworth, Hertfordshire

LETTERS



ABOVE: Hilton Park's "space age service station of 1967"

We continued to Junction 11 where we exited and then headed back south, before pulling off into the service station car park. Everything was shut and it was completely empty – except for a lone caravan! We were greeted by a family from Yorkshire who had set out the day before for a caravan holiday in South Wales.

Given the distance involved and the fact there was not the same motorway network then as there is today, they had decided to break the journey overnight by stopping in the service station car park. They saw that Hilton Park had not been opened but this didn't matter, as they were self-contained in their caravan and would set off early the following morning. So they backed the caravan into a parking bay and unhitched it from their car, which they parked alongside. When they woke up in the morning, someone had stolen their car! So they were faced with the prospect of spending a holiday in a caravan on an empty car park in an unopened service station. Needless to say, we felt very sorry for them – but it made for a really good story.

The question we were all asking was who could have stolen the car? It was too far and difficult for anyone to plausibly walk to the service station from any neighbouring housing across countryside. It also seemed unlikely that someone would have pulled off the motorway into an unopened service station on the off-chance that there might be a car to steal, given that you wouldn't expect anyone to be there. Nevertheless, the only explanation we could think of

was that there was a gang that cruised motorways looking to steal cars from service station car parks, and that it just happened to check if there might be a car at Hilton Park; to the ill fortune of the Yorkshire family. I never found out if and when the family got away from Hilton Park. My guess is that they somehow managed to hire a car for the week, and then drove straight home with no overnight stop on the return journey.

Rob Gandy
Wirral, Merseyside

Miniature alien

If I may comment on the "A Miniature Mystery" report [FT404:4], it is hardly surprising that Melissa Braham's alleged photo of a tiny humanoid figure has been ridiculed and labelled a fake. Putting aside the obvious cartoon-like quality of the figure, Braham's assertion that she hadn't seen the 'creature' when she took the photo further stretches credulity: without the presence of the figure as a reason to take such a picture, it would be highly unlikely that anyone would take a photograph of a bland, uninspiring deserted street with a few trees.

But perhaps therein lies a clue, and probably one of many. An interesting feature of hoaxter psychology is that the hoaxter cannot afford to be too convincing, otherwise the intellectual gratification of 'getting one over' the Great, the Good and the Gullible would be a damp squib and – if I may mix a metaphor – fall flat on its face. The success of the traditional April Fool joke, for

example, relies on its contrived silliness hiding in plain sight. The inability to perceive what is clearly a prank is what determines the fool.

Secondly, the report ends with a reference to the fact that 3.8 billion people worldwide currently own a smartphone equipped with a high-quality camera, and yet there has been no significant increase in photographic evidence for anomalous entities. At the risk of appearing dogmatic, I tend to the view that all genuine paranormal encounters are experienced in an altered state of consciousness; rather like the dream-state, which accounts for the fact that the ludicrous and illogical elements of most dreams are not questioned during the dream. It is only after one regains wakefulness and is able to reflect upon the 'down-the-rabbit-hole' narrative, that the dream is promptly recognised as nonsensical.

Consequently, paranormal or anomalous experiences are also governed by a dream-like state of consciousness. The late Tim Dinsdale spent many years on the banks of Loch Ness in search of its elusive monster. He once related his frustration and annoyance when, after an entire day manning his camera, he allegedly caught sight of Nessie, spun the camera around on its swivel-headed tripod – and the shot was blocked by the trunk of a stout tree! Time and time again, genuine paranormal experiences seem governed by the same trickster-like laws that govern dream imagery. That is why there are few, if any, photographic examples of the paranormal – with the exception of good old-fashioned hoaxes, of course.

John Chordman
Sheffield, South Yorkshire

Melissa Braham's tiny humanoid figure is a wooden cutout. It's artistically made and the clarity of the shadow behind it belies it being any kind of

illusion.

It's odd how certainty can hit you, but looking at it I feel certain that's what it is. Is certainty a feeling, I wonder, a tap on the shoulder from the unconscious to say, "Yes, we have enough cumulative evidence here, this is a dead cert"? Feelings like that have always been a better guide to me in real decisions than conscious measuring of evidence.

It's two-dimensional and I would guess that it has extensions from the feet that have been driven into the earth beneath it. It's wonderfully done, and just like the Cottingley case, sits on the border between imagination and the extraordinary. We expect our otherworldly visions to be aesthetically striking.

Dean Teasdale
Gateshead, Tyne & Wear



I received an email from Marc, my first-hand witness to the Ruskington Goblin, just before my article appeared in print [FT405:4]. As an FT subscriber, he was struck by the photo accompanying "A Miniature Mystery" in the previous issue [FT404:4], claiming to show a tiny humanoid figure walking across Balder Drive in St Helens, Lancashire. None of the humanoid's features resembled the entity that he saw, but it was about the same size.

Rob Gandy
Wirral, Merseyside



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126. Beltane at Butser Ancient Farm

LISA GLEDHILL enjoys some experimental archaeology with a dash of pop-culture and *Wicker Man*-style pyromania

It's early on a mild spring evening when the drums begin. A procession leaves the wattle and thatch huts, dressed in horns, tatters and face paint. While the May Queen and Green Man dance, the drummers line up beside a towering wooden figure. The fire is kindled and the wicker giant bursts into flame. This isn't Summerisle or the Black Rock Desert, it's Hampshire. Just off the A3.

No one knows exactly when the Beltane festival began at Butser Ancient Farm – not even the people who run the place. All they can say, based on old photographs, is that it has definitely been going on for more than 30 years. It started out as a small celebration for a group of people taking part in a remarkable archaeological experiment, but in recent years it has grown into a flamboyant public festival attracting up to 2,500 people.

The 2020 event was cancelled due to Covid 19, but this year the Butser team came up with an alternative. A 25ft (7.6m) tall figure was built, burned and filmed as a virtual sacrifice to welcome in the summer and help launch their brand-new website, Butser Plus.

Rachel Bingham, the Creative Developer at Butser Ancient Farm, explains: "Historically, the idea of a wicker man is quite tenuous. There's a reference to it in Caesar's *Gallic Wars* but whether it's connected to Beltane... well, it's kind of creative license and we think of it just as a celebration. We couldn't go two years without celebrating it, even though we can't have many people here in person."

"The idea is to film the burning of the wicker man alongside some of the other key activities of Beltane, like the

storytellers and the drummers, and weave it into a piece of content that will go on the new online platform that we're developing to share and support our work. It's a way to help the farm keep going in these strange times and to share the experience of the wicker man with people wherever they might be."

Butser Ancient Farm began in the early 1970s as an open-air laboratory created by the Council For British Archaeology to test theories about life in the Iron Age. Experimental archaeology was still quite a radical concept back then, and under its first Director, Peter Reynolds, the Butser project led the way in new discoveries about farming, food and above all, house-building. You might recognise it as a filming location for the TV shows *Horrible Histories* and *Britannia*. *Doctor Who* fans of a certain age may even recall Joan Sims as a futuristic Boudicca, leading her tribe into battle from an early Butser roundhouse.

In normal times Butser holds courses in everything from flint-knapping to ancient music, for schoolchildren, students and anyone who just wants to find out more about how our ancestors did stuff. Most of the year, a steady trickle of visitors



TOP: One of Butser's re-enactors helping bring Iron Age culture to life. ABOVE: A general view of Butser Ancient Farm.

PHOTOS: LISA GLEDHILL



ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT: Butser's latest addition – a Neolithic longhouse based on an excavation in Horton, Berkshire. BELOW: The atmospheric space inside the 'Horton House' – low benches surround the central hearth and cooking pots.

gently time-travel between the Anglo Saxon, Roman, Iron Age and Neolithic areas, soaking up the history; but like many independent organisations, Butser has been hit hard by the pandemic. "It's the weirdest feeling – you have a thriving site that has thousands of people visiting every year, and 35,000 schoolchildren, so to lose that almost overnight was scary," says the farm's Director Simon Jay.

"After getting over the initial shock, you start to fight back, to look at what we're doing every day and think how we can change it and adapt. That's how we came up with the idea of Butser Plus. When you go in, you can learn more about experimental archaeology and learn more in depth about the weird and quirky things we end up doing. But there's a wellbeing element too. The world at the moment is chaotic and full of anxiety and we know that a connection to our ancestors is hugely important. Really exploring the distant past can help people mentally as well."

The team at Butser are also celebrating the completion of their newest ancient building – a reconstructed Neolithic longhouse based on an excavation at Horton in Berkshire. This is one of the larger structures on the site, about 15 by 7.5m (50 by 25ft), with wattle-and-daub walls and a reed-thatched roof sloping to the ground. The "windows" are made of stretched skins and

Exploring the distant past can help people mentally"

inside, low benches surround a central hearth with cooking pots. In this atmospheric space, it's easy to imagine you are back in the Stone Age, but is this really how our ancestors would have lived?

"I think it's really important to acknowledge that this is just one interpretation," says Site Archaeologist Claire Walton. "We only had six post holes and some slot or foundation

trenches, so there could be other interpretations that represent the footprint just as well; but for very practical reasons, this is the one that we chose. We have engineered it from the ground up.

"The first thing is that the roof has to be a certain pitch, it's made of natural materials, so it has to be at least 45 degrees or the thatch will rot. If you put that pitch on top of a building with walls then you're looking at a really giant building using lots of materials. So I thought 'Hang on, if I just removed the walls and I put a roof on the ground, does that still fit with the archaeological footprint?' And the answer is yes it does. It actually creates an incredibly strong structure. This was genuinely an experiment

because we didn't know how easy it would be. This footprint was unique and no one else has tried experimenting with it."

The Horton house was built by staff and volunteers from Butser along with members of the original excavation team from Wessex Archaeology. The skills the team learn from making and using the building will help them interpret future excavations.

"It shines light into the corners," says Claire. "The past is quite magical and being inside a building like this gives people a way to connect with it."

As the wicker man blazes up into the darkening sky, it's easy to feel some of that magic. It might not be historic, but listening to pagan-inspired





percussionists The Pentacle Drummers pounding out their potent rhythms at the feet of the blazing giant certainly fires the imagination and makes the heart beat faster. In other years, the event brings together an eclectic mix of re-enactors, families and curious people (in every sense of the word). It seems that one of Butser Ancient Farm's most important archaeological experiments has taken place without really being planned. They've made more than just houses and tools – they've created a compelling and unifying community ritual.

You can see videos of the burning man and of the Horton House at www.butserplus.com or find out more about the farm at www.butserancientfarm.co.uk.

♦ LISA GLEDHILL is a film-maker, writer and occasional eclectic Pagan with a long-standing interest in forteana. She is a regular contributor to FT.

WHAT IS BELTANE?

Beltane is an old Gaelic festival, usually celebrated on 1 May, about half way between the Spring Equinox and the Summer Solstice. It is one of the four most significant festivals for many Wiccans and other modern Pagans, along with Lughnassadh, Samhain and Imbolc. The festival marks the beginning of summer and fire plays a significant part in the celebrations. In Gaels regions of the British Isles, traditions of driving livestock through or between fires to protect and purify them seem to have existed at least until the 18th century. The name itself might derive from proto-Celtic words meaning 'bright fire'. Well-dressings, making flower garlands and maypole dances are also traditionally associated with the beginning of May.

In popular culture of the 20th century, Beltane acquired sinister connotations mainly due to the works of Dennis Wheatley and other sensational writers who associated the festival with Satanism. The idea of combining May Day celebrations with a sacrificial burning figure of the kind described by Julius Cesar seems to have first occurred in the 1973 film *The Wicker Man* (see FT381:36-43) Today, many secular communities and Pagan groups around the UK and English-speaking nations hold Beltane festivals. One of the most spectacular is the Beltane Fire Festival held each year on Calton Hill in Edinburgh.

TOP LEFT: The Green Man and the May Queen. ABOVE LEFT: The Pentacle Drummers bring the beat. ABOVE: The wicker man is put to the torch. TOP RIGHT: The blazing giant

PECULIAR POSTCARDS

JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past tells the story of a mysterious woman found haunting the moors and cliffs of Penzance



17. JEANNIE, THE CORNISH HERMIT

In 1903, the Penzance police and workhouse authorities became aware that a hermit was living on the moors and wandering the cliffs: a young woman who seemed quite half-witted. When apprehended by the police, she told them her name was 'Jeannie' and that she liked to take walks by the seaside. Since she was very thin, and had no access to victuals of any description, the constables took her to Penzance Workhouse. Jeannie offered no clues as to her true identity. She spoke good English, although it was noted that she had a bundle of papers in a foreign language, which she jealously guarded. The half-starved 'Cornish Hermit', as she became known in the newspapers, ate and drank well at the workhouse, but still she pined for a solitary life in the wild: in late September, she scaled a garden wall and ran off. There was consternation among the workhouse authorities, and a sharp lookout was kept at the cliffs in case she had returned to her old haunts. A few days later, a farmer noticed his sheepdogs barking angrily in the field, and he saw the Cornish Hermit trying to hide in the grass. She was recaptured and taken back to the workhouse. A few days later, Jeannie escaped again, and this time the foolhardy hermit was missing for a week, before being discovered lying half dead in a field, without boots and with her clothes in rags, having gone without food for five days and nights in freezing cold weather.

Jeannie survived all her escapades, and ate heartily at the workhouse. Since there was much curiosity about her true identity, charitable local people collected £40, which would be given to her as soon as she had recovered and her identity was known. There was also curiosity



ABOVE: A postcard of Jeannie, stamped and posted in March 1904.

as to what event had unhinged her sensitive female intellect and caused her to roam the countryside in a half-demented state, longing for solitude. One day, Mr Ellis, the President of the Plymouth Hebrew Congregation, came to see her; he knew Russian and was able to declare, after reading through Jeannie's bundle of papers, that she was a Jewish Russian Pole, having been born in the town of Shvel. He spoke to her in both Russian and Yiddish, but she did not respond or react in any way. Mr Ellis hoped to trace Jeannie's family by writing to every person mentioned in the bundle of papers, and after a few weeks, he received a letter from

a certain Mr Schmulovitch, who claimed to be the hermit's father. Her mind had become deranged after a love affair went wrong, he explained, and she had been absent from home for many years. He offered to come and fetch her, if he was given the passage money, and the workhouse authorities willingly agreed.

After Jeannie had spent Christmas Day in the workhouse, recovering her strength, her father arrived in Penzance on 6 January. A sturdy, venerable-looking Russian, he seemed genuinely pleased to see the Cornish Hermit, whose escapades had reached even the London newspapers. When

he spoke to her in Russian, she did not respond, but she seemed to recognise him as her father, embraced him, and agreed to accompany him back to Russia. She had no recollection at all of her previous life, she said, and seemed as scatter-brained as ever. Mr Schmulovitch said that after being forsaken by her lover many years ago, Jeannie's intellect had become seriously deranged. Inconsolable after being crossed in love, she had left Russia and gone to Philadelphia. She had come to England 10 years earlier, and had been incarcerated in a Bournemouth asylum for three months, but had escaped to lead a nomadic existence as a tramp for many years before she was rescued by the humane and public-spirited Penzance Workhouse guardians.

On 8 January, the *Daily Mail* could announce that Mr Schmulovitch and Jeannie had arrived in London, their travel arrangements made by the Jewish Board of Guardians, who also looked after their comfort and safety during the journey, since the father spoke no English at all, and the unpredictable hermit needed constant supervision to prevent her from leaping off the train and wandering away. Later in January they arrived in Berlin, where Jeannie again escaped to go walking about the streets; but fortunately she was recaptured and once more united with her long-suffering parent.

The last thing we know about the Cornish Hermit is that in February 1904, her father wrote back to the generous Mr Ellis to relate that after a long and gruelling journey, he and his daughter were now back in Shvel; her memory had begun to return, and she had started to speak Russian again.

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WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lot* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX

MME. ASTRALOOZI - GHOST DOG

HUNT EMERSON



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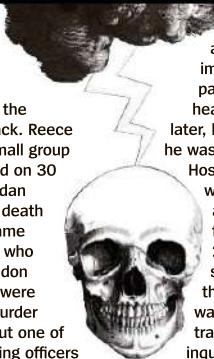
STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A man was stabbed to death in a violent altercation at a Croydon vigil held to commemorate the victim of another knife attack. Reece Young, 23, was one of a small group of friends who had gathered on 30 March to remember Tai Jordan O'Donnell, 19, who bled to death after being knifed at the same spot on 3 March. Two men who later arrived at a south London hospital with stab wounds were arrested on suspicion of murder when police were called, but one of them escaped after attacking officers and NHS staff, forcing his way out of the building. *E.Standard, 31 Mar; BBC News, 1 Apr 2021.*

In some densely populated areas of China there is a ban on traditional burials and cremation is enforced, but there remains a strong belief that burial is the only way to bring peace to the dead, who will then protect their descendants. To try to get round this ban a family in Shanwei, in Guangdong province, paid the equivalent of nearly £12,000 to a man identified only by his surname, Huang, to obtain a substitute body that could be cremated. They would then bury their deceased relative in secret using traditional rites. Rather than find an existing corpse to fulfil the deal, Huang instead lured Lin Shoren, 36, a man with Down's Syndrome, into his car, where he plied him with alcohol and murdered him. He nailed Shoren's corpse into a coffin and passed it on to the family, who had him cremated. The crime was not uncovered until two years after Lin Shoren had been reported missing. Huang was handed a suspended death sentence, but as the authorities were satisfied that the family were not aware that their substitute corpse was someone killed to order, they avoided prison and were convicted of "insulting a corpse". *BBC News, D.Telegraph, 14 April 2021.*

Yasir Hussain, 10, died after falling and banging his head during a playground football game at Leigh Primary School, Birmingham. An inquest heard that his oversized trainers "may have been a factor leading to his fall". First aiders at the school called for an ambulance, but it failed to turn up. The call handler for West Midlands Ambulance Service apologised, explaining the service was "extremely busy" that day due to the pandemic. The schoolboy was taken home by his mother



after his condition apparently improved. Yasir was given paracetamol after complaining of head pains. Five-and-a-half hours later, his condition deteriorated, and he was taken to Birmingham Children's Hospital. The young Aston Villa fan, who had dreamt of becoming a professional footballer, died five days later on 12 November 2020. First- aider Zahira Mabine, stationed in the playground at the time of the incident, said it was unclear why the schoolboy's trainers were so big, telling the inquest that she had mentioned this to Yasir's mother and grandmother when they arrived at the school after being notified of his fall. "I said it's really important he has the correct shoe size because they could cause him to have a fall." *D.Mail, 13 Apr 2021.*

Buddhist monk Thammakorn Wangpreecha, 68, cut off his own head with a home-made guillotine on his birthday. His body was found with its head severed in the Wat Phu Hin temple in the Nong Bua Lamphu province of Thailand alongside a marble slab inscribed with his plans. These explained that he had been planning the ritual for five years in the belief that the sacrifice would result in him being reincarnated as a higher spiritual being in the next life. A statue of the Buddha was positioned so that it would appear to be holding his head, once severed. After his post-mortem, 300 of the monk's followers arrived at the temple for his funeral rites, placing his body in a coffin and his head in a separate casket before taking his remains out into a forest to be burned. One of them said: "He fulfilled his goal and achieved enlightenment." The National Office of Buddhism in Thailand, though, emphasised that the practice was not encouraged and asked people to give money or free captive birds as a sacrifice instead. *Metro, 20 April; D. Mail 20 April; <i>D.</i>, 22 April 2021.*

Children's author James Nash, 42, was shot with a home-made shotgun then beaten to death in his garden in Hampshire by his neighbour Alex Sartain, 34. Sartain believed Nash spied on him for the Russian President Vladimir Putin and also that the CIA, MI6 and NASA were after him. After the killing, Sartain fled on a motorbike and was himself killed when he crashed while being chased by police. *Sun 20 April 2021.*

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